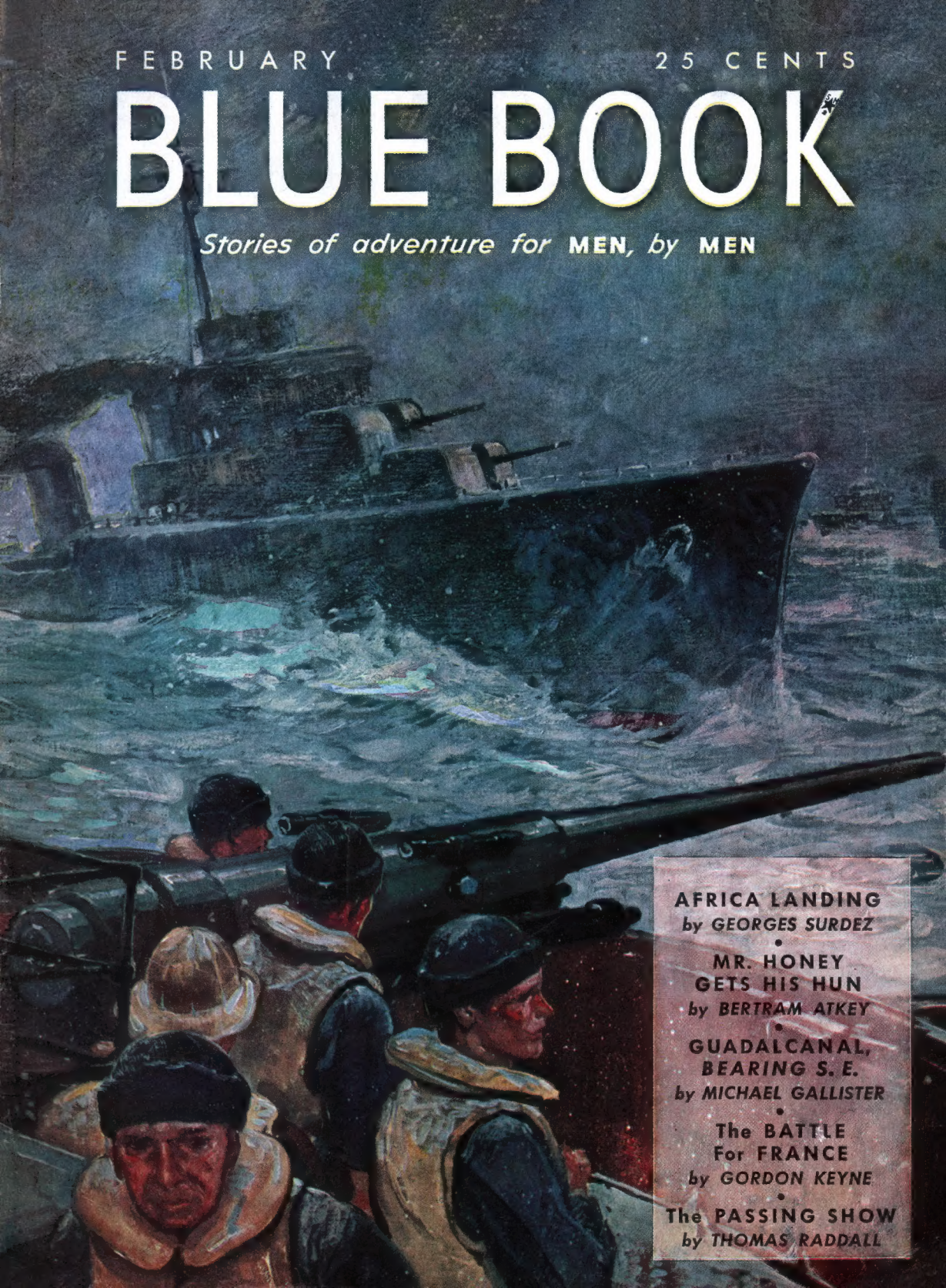


FEBRUARY

25 CENTS

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN



AFRICA LANDING

by GEORGES SURDEZ

**MR. HONEY
GETS HIS HUN**

by BERTRAM ATKEY

**GUADALCANAL,
BEARING S. E.**

by MICHAEL GALLISTER

**The BATTLE
For FRANCE**

by GORDON KEYNE

The PASSING SHOW

by THOMAS RADDALL

Who's Who in this Issue

Bertram Atkey

REQUESTED to produce some sort of explanation to account for himself, Bertram says: "Born some hundreds of years ago (as it seems), I was at once discovered to have little respect for convention and even less for un-convention. Which left me so starkly stranded on the beach of Uncertainty that the only career obviously open to me was that of fiction writer.

"My mother, having named me Bertram (which means in English 'Fair—Illusrious,' thus proving, what I have always claimed for her, that she had a grand sense of humor and loved a joke), left me more or less free to get on with said career. Except for an occasional duck-in to some other form of enterprise—editing, sports journalism, advertisement canvassing, estate agency, brick-making, insurance, auctioneering, and the usual ration of soldiering—and a subsequent duck-out to resume my activities as imaginative scribe, I have driven the old quill in all gears for such a frightfully long time that I have to plead guilty to what must be somewhat between five hundred and a thousand short stories and a whole boiling of books.

"I have always been very glad that I seemed to please Americans with my characters *Winnie O'Wynn*, *Colonel Clumber*, *Mr. Honey*, *Captain Comorant* and *Smiler Bunn*, in *The Saturday Evening Post*, the *BLUE BOOK* and other periodicals. Felt a bit of a rest due to me some time back and took it. Jerked out of said rest by War. After various physical activities directed against the Hun, and the painful discovery that these did not improve my form at my favorite indoor sport of sciatica, I have now settled down to the task of earning enough good U. S. dollars to improve the rate of exchange.

"I am delighted to know that you are liking my present stories—but you don't like them as much as I like your pork-sausage meat, than which nothing better ever came in cans. I like your ideas about food.

"But, to be serious for a moment, believe me, pork sausage meat is not the only thing, God knows, for which we British sincerely thank and salute you, America!"



Bertram Atkey



Charles Courtney

THE high lights of Charles Courtney's fascinating life-story are told in the extended excerpts from his book "Unlocking Adventure," which began on page 112. Mr. Courtney's fingers (which have been insured for as high as one hundred thousand dollars) have led him into adventures as fantastic, entertaining, and nerve-tling as any in our day. He is the world's highest paid legal *Jimmy Valentine*. His jobs take him wherever there is a safe no one else can crack. The safes of Kaiser Wilhelm, the chests that held the crown jewels of the Romanoffs, the strong-boxes that ex-King Alfonso of Spain brought with him when he escaped to France, are but a few which have yielded to Mr. Courtney's fingers.

Some of his most spine-chilling adventures have been on the floor of the sea. He unlocked the safes of the *Egypt*, torpedoed during World War I with a cargo of gold and diamonds, and was engaged by Sir Basil Zaharoff, the mystery man of Europe, to work on the wreck of the British cruiser *Hampshire*. He and two other divers went down and found the gold she was carrying, but met a catastrophe that killed his companions and turned his hair completely white.

BLUE BOOK

February, 1943

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Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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READERS' FORUM

"WHAT DOES THAT STORY HAVE?"

When I first read your story, "Another World Begins," by Nelson Bond, in your November issue, I thought all sorts of bad things about it: It was terrible; it certainly was not entertaining; I wished I hadn't spent my time reading it. Why should anyone write a story like that? Then that night I went to a party; and oddly enough, I found myself thinking about "Another World Begins." That night I lay in bed thinking about it. Perhaps it wasn't so terrible after all.

That was one week ago, and as I write this, I still remember it. Rarely do I remember a story so vividly that long. So I have drawn the conclusion that I will never, never forget that story, and I don't know why. What does that story have that won't let me forget it? I certainly don't know—but I wish more stories had it.

Roy McCoy,
Fort Worth, Texas.

TO STIR US TO SUSTAINED ACTION

Please print all the real he-man war stories you can obtain. In the midst of our unwarranted equanimity, move our feeble hands, stir us to sustained action for our loved ones who carry the banners of freedom and humanity on our far-flung battle-fronts.

Teach me to hate this monstrous eruption of white and yellow "Aryan" bestiality. Make us all feel every hour of every blessed peaceful day on American soil what we owe, every one of us, to our incomparable defenders . . . so that we can muster every bit of aid for our heroes: From my poor household expenses let me save more than my quota for Victory Bonds. Give me strength through your columns to labor each week for the Victory Drive, packing magazines and books for our boys overseas until my back aches and my arms grow numb. Give me courage by example to go on in a war-shocked world, and thereby help me to retain my unbroken belief in the final triumph of all our efforts for, and with, the Holy Spirit of Man.

Mrs. G. T. Barnett,
Seattle, Washington.



WAR BONDS AND STAMPS
FOR VICTORY

(The Readers' Forum continues on inside back cover.)

THIS REMARKABLE STORY BY THE DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR OF "HIS MAJESTY'S YANKEES" SUGGESTS WHY THERE ARE NOW NO FORTS ALONG THE CANADIAN BOUNDARY.

by Thomas
H. Raddall

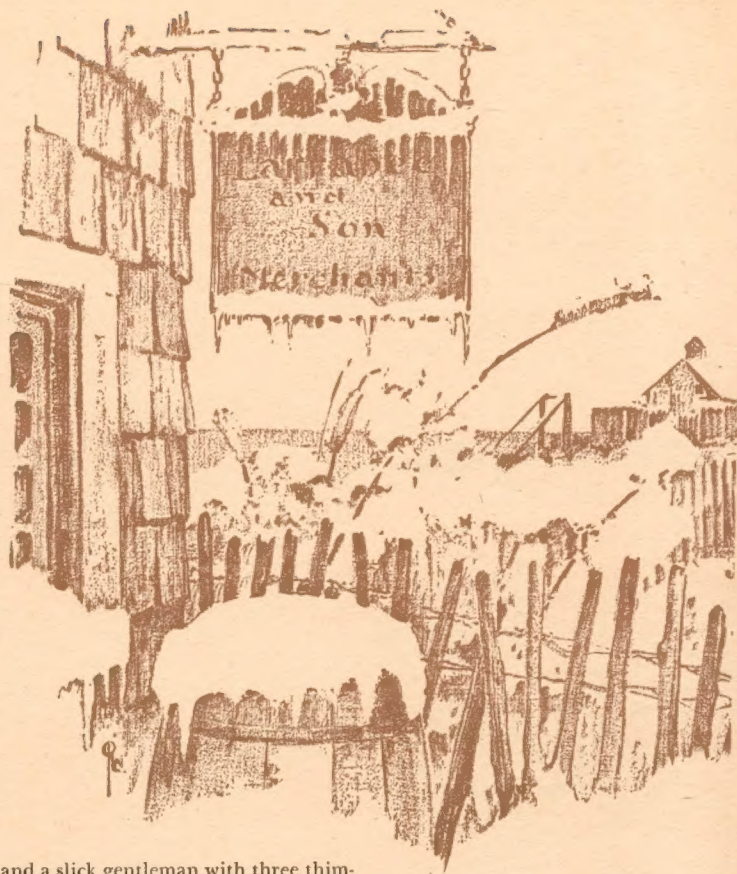
ENTERTAINMENT was rare in Oldport in those days. Perhaps the times were entertainment enough after the wars began in 1793; for the West India trade was ruined by French privateers, and Oldport shipowners turned to privateering on their own account, as they had done in the American War. In the far waters of the Caribbean our fishermen and woodsmen and townsmen found new and exciting occupations.

Scarce a fortnight passed without a privateer returning scarred with weather and battle and full of tales; or a prize tacking up the estuary, giving a gun and three cheers as she crossed the bar; or a recruiting parade for the latest letter-of-marque, with the enlisted seamen marching up and down Fore Street, gay with ribbons, cutlasses swinging from belts, an ensign flaming on a pike before them, a powder-boy rattling his drum.

Prisoners, swarthy men, strange and sad, wandered feebly about the narrow wooden streets, catching the bright curious glances of the healthy Bluenose girls. Bearded and sun-burned men in the taverns told great yarns of yellow jack and hurricane; of sea sharks and land sharks and the busy shipworm of the warm seas that broke men's hearts at the pumps; of fights ashore and afloat under a burning sun; and the lotus life of the islands where rum flowed like water, and dark girls had easy manners.

As a consequence of all this, there was a constant chaffer in Oldport counting-houses, and auctions of captured ships and goods—cacao and sugar and rum, and boots and hats and silk waistcoats, and indigo and logwood and casks of oranges. The town waxed fat. For the first time in its history cash was plentiful, and strange cash it was. Though merchants kept accounts in pounds, shillings and pence, the standard of currency then and for many years was the Spanish dollar, the famous old piece-of-eight reals; and about it, at fixed rates of exchange posted on every merchant's door, circulated coinage from half the world.

Strangers came to fish in this glittering stream—peddlers and trollops,



and a slick gentleman with three thimbles and a button; but entertainers proper were few. Perhaps the little Nova Scotia seaport lay too far from the gay world, or by some sort of mummer's intelligence it was known the Pilgrim conscience of its founders lay like ice beneath the surface. Those who came are recorded carefully in Colonel Larrabee's diary. There were Swiss bell-ringers, "*decent People & a verry Elegant Performance.*" There were rope-dancers who for want of better space performed in James Gow's sail-loft; but the young woman of the troupe scandalized the older citizens with her long cotton-stockinged legs, and Sumter Larrabee ordered the show out of town.

There was the singular affair of Mr. Harrap and the Learned Pig, which told fortunes by placing her neat polished hoots upon lettered cards, and came to a sad end—kidnaped, no less, by a party of rollicking tars from H.M.S. Bream. ("*Where is my Learned Pig?*") demanded outraged Mr. Harrap of the town's chief magistrate. "*I suspect,*" replied Sumter with immense gravity and no less truth, "*she is now His Majesty's boiled pork.*")

But clearest of all to posterity are Signor Malatesta and his waxworks, a Larrabee legend, handed from generation to generation in the tall-pillared wooden house where the Larrabees had their Oldport being for a hundred and fifty years.

Sumter's diary makes merely a passing note of the Signor's arrival, thus:

"Sunday, Jan 5th, 1800. Cold weather and good sleighing. I ride in my sleigh to the Methodist Meeting and hear a Tolerable good sermon. Brig Betsey, Rington master, returns from Boston, reports Fish in poor Demand & prices Low. Brings a little Corn, some salt Pork, Cyder & apples. One Mallatesti comes with Rington & has some Wax Works, some kind of Raree Show as I understand."

He was in his store, in the counting-room, next morning when Signor Malatesta called. It was cold. A chill vapor rose from the harbor, coated the rigging of the ships with white hoar, and wound a shroud about the waterfront. The snow had a shrill whine underfoot, and the planks of the stoop crackled as Signor Mala-

The PASSING SHOW

*Illustrated by
Charles Chickering*



testa approached the door. The store of Larrabee & Son was an unpretentious affair of pine boards and hand-split shingles, two narrow stories and a garret, running beside a lane toward the wharf, with an end facing Fore Street. A squat brick chimney sent up a blue column of wood-smoke toward the canopy of frost vapor that hung over the town in the bitter January morning. Malatesta, not used to such temperatures, flung himself inside and slammed the door as if pursued by wolves.

THE interior was dim after the white light of the street. A meager gleam entered a pair of windows flanking the front door; and from two others, smaller and frost-obscured, near the back of the long wooden cavern in which he stood. A vague multitude of bins and barrels and shelves loomed in the twilight, and a strong mingled smell of molasses, vinegar, Jamaica spirits, leather, drapery goods, paint, tea, coffee and spices floated

about him with an illusion of warmth, though he could see his breath rising in little clouds.

Out of this scented murk swam the face of young Johnny Hampton, apprenticed to Colonel Larrabee by the overseers of the poor—a lank orphan of fifteen with bony red wrists protruding out of his jacket sleeves, and wearing a pair of thick homespun long-togs that ended sailor-fashion at his gray woolen calves. He snuffled a long red nose and regarded Signor Malatesta with some astonishment. Customers were unusual at that hour of a winter morning. A customer like Malatesta was unusual any time.

The Signor had hidden himself from the weather in a capacious black cloak, with a woolly muffler wound about throat and mouth. A Barcelona handkerchief bound his glossy black hair, and over the handkerchief a little old cocked hat was jammed as far as it would go. Between muffler and handkerchief emerged a nose longer and sharper and redder than Johnny Hampton's, and a pair of small round black eyes glittered like

jet-stones. Behind the muffler sounded a continuous rattle of teeth.

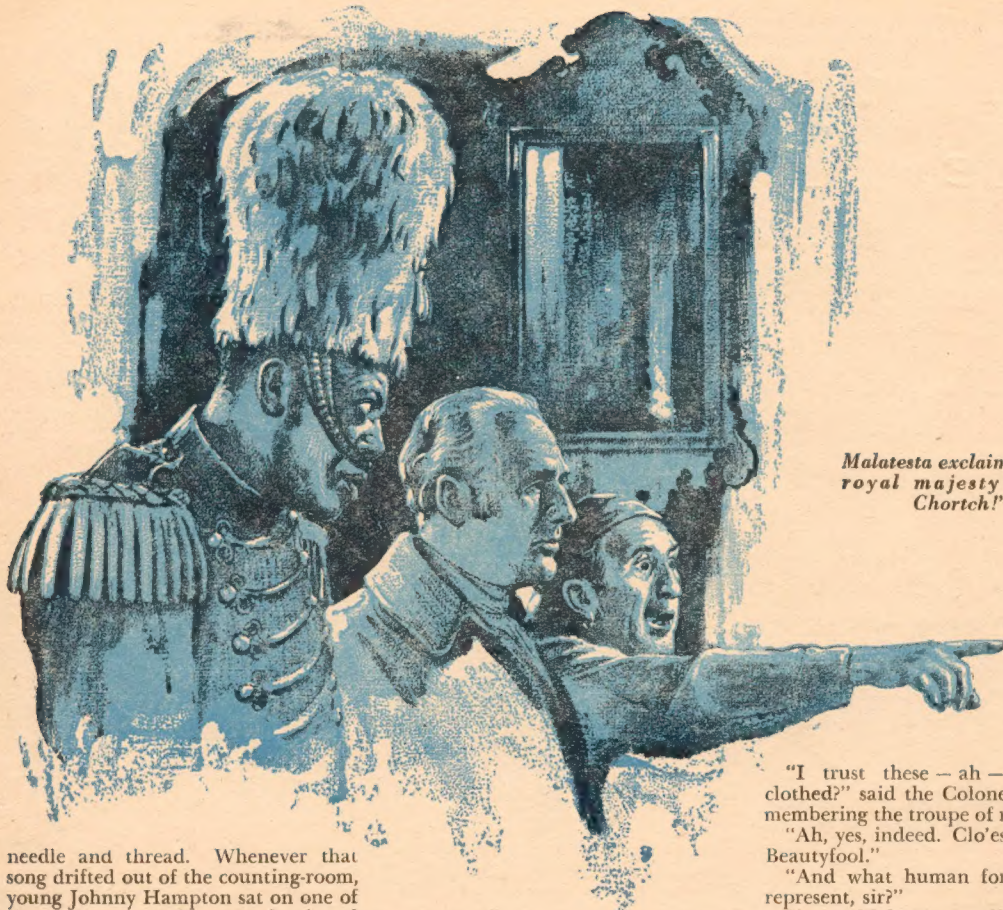
"The Colonel Larrabee ees een, no?" gibbered Signor Malatesta.

Gaping Johnny waved him toward the door of the counting-room, and watched the Signor step inside.

"Furriner!" muttered Johnny. His mind was stuffed with tales of war and the sea, and beheld Oldport as a sort of island surrounded by hostile furriners like this little mincing man in the cloak. But largely they inhabited a country far to the south, where the sun drifted in winter, and where the men of Oldport went to drub them for pieces-of-eight, not to mention eagles and crowns and joes and half-joes and doubloons. Sometimes the furriners spoke French, and you called them Johnny Crapaw. The rest were Spanyers and lived on the Spanish Main, where gold grew on bushes and Oldport privateers did a thriving business. As for the rest of the world, there was the King, who lived in England (a legendary country on the other side of the world), remote and magnificent as God in heaven; and nearer home the Americans, who had fought the King upon a time, and therefore were furriners the same as Crapaws and Spanyers.

The queer thing was that Americans looked and talked exactly like Oldport folk. When American skipper came to do business, the Colonel addressed them as "you Yankees." It had a stinging sound, though the Colonel said it pleasantly, and the Yankees seemed to like it, just as Colonel Larrabee never minded being called "a rale old high-Tory Carolinian, dyed in the wool."

But when an old Loyalist soldier came to the store for a yarn or a shilling, or both, and the Colonel called for tobacco and glasses and a pair of new clays and a bottle of peach brandy from the last Savannah voyage—then the Yankees became "the rebels," and there was a great pounding of fists on the counting-room table, and tales of old battles; and the visit ended always with a song, a queer leaping song that made Johnny's feet itch for the road, with a line about "*Tarleton and his loyal boys a-riding*" that weaved in and out of the song like



Malatesta exclaimed "Ees royal majesty Keeng Chortch!"

needle and thread. Whenever that song drifted out of the counting-room, young Johnny Hampton sat on one of the molasses putcheons and grinned and marveled.

SIGNOR MALATESTA found himself in the presence of a tall spare man of fifty, with a dark aquiline face clean shaven to a point just short of the cheek-bones, where the thick black hair began. His coat, stock, breeches and stockings were black too, but these sober garments were offset by a bright scarlet waistcoat, which gave him, in Malatesta's eyes, the look of one of those preposterous American robins. At the moment Sumter's bony fingers held a pewter inkpot, which he was thawing in the heat thrown out by a blazing Franklin stove. Three walls were hung with nautical prints. Upon the fourth, dropping from ceiling to floor, hung the ragged tricolor of the *Renard*, captured off Guadeloupe by an Old-port privateer the previous year. The softwood floor was bare and worn. Two or three chairs stood about Sumter's long oak table. A wooden clock ticked on the mantelpiece. The windows were clouded with intricate frost patterns, but the upper panes were beginning to throw a little.

"Signor Larrabee?" murmured the visitor, prying off his hat.

"At your service, sir," Colonel Larrabee declared, turning.

"I am Mario Malatesta, signor, a citizen of the keengdom of Napoli."

Sumter examined him with a cold eye. The fellow spoke English with fluency, but a strong foreign accent crept in and out of it. Sumter was distrustful of foreigners, and he did not like that glib word *citizen*. It had a republican sound.

"And your business, sir?"

"Signor, I am the creator and owner of Malatesta's Celebrated Waxworks, education - to - young - and - old - and - warranted - not - to - breeng - a - blos - to - the - mos' - delicat - cheek."

He paused for breath, and caressed his mustache. "I am eenform, signor, I must 'ave first a permission of the chif magistrat. Ees you, no?"

"Yes," Sumter admitted. "Sit down, sir. What is the nature of these—ah—waxworks?"

The visitor opened his cloak. "Wax-work, signor, ees an image of the human form, but of wax."

"I trust these—ah—images are clothed?" said the Colonel darkly, remembering the troupe of rope-dancers. "Ah, yes, indeed. Clo'es, yes, signor. Beautyfool."

"And what human forms do they represent, sir?"

Signor Malatesta swelled. "Julius Caesar, the great emperor of Rome."

"Um!"

"Brit-hanya, the Quin of the Seal!"

"Ah!"

"Ees Majesty Keeng Chortch of Engelland!"

"Well!" Sumter warmed. He had feared something outlandish and perhaps immoral.

Shrewdly he said: "Perhaps if I could see for myself—a formality, you understand, sir, a mere formality—"

Malatesta spread his hands in the manner of one who has nothing to conceal. A delighted Neapolitan smile shone in the room like a sun.

"Come! Come, signor! At the tavern of Signor Falp. I am honor—we—Malatesta's Celebrated Waxwork are honor—"

"This afternoon," murmured Sumter, a little overwhelmed, "at three of the clock."

Signor Malatesta arose and swept the little cocked hat to his breast. "Breeng your family, signor, your frands! To a frand of the Colonel Larrabee"—he laid a long unclean finger against his carrot nose—"costs eb-so-lute-ly notting! Notting!"

THEY were quite a show in themselves, going down from Larrabee House to Phelps' Tavern: Sumter in black velvet gaiters buttoned to the thigh, his favorite blue cloak, his best London hat cocked with gilt buttons; young Allan with a thick sea-jacket over his broadcloth; and the handsome Larrabee daughters, Arabella, Flora, Catherine, Priscilla, all four in new green pelisses of imported English lady's cloth; black Hagar bringing up the rear in a pair of stout cow-hide boots and an old army greatcoat. As they gained the town pump at the foot of the hill, Sumter paused in the trampled ice-splattered snow and sent a thoughtful glance toward his store.

"Young Johnny'll never have a chance like this, Allan. You go down to the store and take his place for half an hour."

Allan gazed longingly at the snowy roof of Phelps' Tavern.

"You shall see the show tonight with the townspeople," Sumter declared firmly. "And pay your way like any other, for the look o' the thing."

Johnny Hampton came on the run, eyes very large, and fell in at the rear

by Hagar's side. The afternoon sun was without warmth, though the snow had lost some of the morning's crispness, and the harbor no longer smoked. A few sleighs were abroad, harness bells a-jingle, riders well muffled in furs; and ox-sleds laden with firewood were coming in from up-river.

The heads of the oxen swayed slowly under the heavy birchwood yokes, with a beard of icicles below each drooping mouth; and the teamsters plodded ahead in homespun and moccasins, crying ox-talk over their shoulders and cracking their little whips. Phelps, late sergeant of the King's Orange Rangers, kept the chief avers of the day, two stories of brown-painted clapboards with a gambrel roof. The surface of his big oak door was a quilt of tattered paper notices, advertisements of Oldport merchants for the most part, and a bold new sheet which declared:

ALL TIGHT LADS

Who wish to serve His Majesty and their Own Fortune can do so by Applying Within or on board that Good Fast-Sailing and well-found Brig, the *Venture* private ship of war, Jonas Follard commander, Now Fitting for a Cruise against the French & Spanish in Southern Waters. Capt. Follard wants a few Jolly Spirited Lads



to compleat her Compliment & will Sail at Once. All who apply Within may expect the Finest Treatment, with grog & Cherry Tod for All!

Sumter paused a moment in the tobacco-spattered snow before this masterpiece and read the notice with satisfaction. The writing was his own (and who in Oldport, barring the schoolmaster, wrote a better hand?), and so was the *Venture*.

He threw open the door, and a tide of warm air poured out over them, heavy with grog and tobacco and human breath, and a smell of damp cloth, and the reek of sea-boots waterproofed with fish-oil. The big main room ran the length of the tavern, divided halfway by a folding wooden partition which could be opened for dances and other spacious affairs. Common folk used the first half, which was in fact the tap-room; the inner chamber was reserved for merchants and captains. Half the business of the town was done in that inner room, a Lloyds' in miniature. The partition was closed now, but the business inside was Malatesta's Celebrated Waxworks; and the door in the central panel was guarded by a huge Negro of an unfamiliar cast, clad

in scarlet and gold (the scarlet shabby, Flora noted aloud, and the gold badly frayed), with a white plumed shako on his woolly head and its glittering chain-metal strap caught under a flat black nose.

A dozen seamen in red nightcaps and blue fear-naught jackets lounged against the bar talking to Captain Jonas Follard, who sat at a small table by the fire with inkhorn and must-roll and a steaming bowl of cherry tod at his elbow. Beyond the fireplace clustered a little throng of townfolk, of both sexes and all sizes, with eyes for nothing but the astonishing Negro tyler. Signor Malatesta had lost no time in advertisement.

AMID a murmur of, "Here's the Colonel!" the Larrabees entered under a massed stare that could be felt.

Seamen pulled forelocks; Phelps threw a veteran hand to his broad red forehead; Captain Follard arose and kicked back his chair and took off his hat. Sumter gave him a nod, and in turning, somehow bestowed the nod upon them all. The big black opened the partition door and whispered inside, and out popped Signor Malatesta, bowing and washing dry hands. Hagar nudged the big buck at the door and giggled as they went in.



It was not much of a show, after all. A dozen costumed figures stood stiff as corpses at the end of the chamber, well removed from a blazing fire. Subtle Malatesta had draped the windows and lit a few candles to heighten the show's pretensions—and to obscure the shabby costumes. Each waxen hand held a card printed in bold letters, but the Signor introduced them with separate oral flourishes, as if they were alive.

"First"—grandly—"we 'ave *Louis the Seexteen'*!"—adding in a hushed voice: "The martyred keeng of the Fransh."

Sumter regarded *Louis the Seexteen'* with contempt. "Martyred! Bah! Sent his troops to play at revolution with the Yankees, and reaped the whirlwind—serve him right! Why, sir, that fellow's fleet shut us up in Yorktown; shut us up, damme, like rats in a hole, with no choice but surrender."

Signor Malatesta moved on hastily to *Admiral Rodney*, an unfortunate choice, for Rodney was in the same boat, so to speak—"A pity he couldn't ha' drubbed De Grasse a year before he did, sir!"

Malatesta began to perspire, though the big drafty room was frigid away from the fire. The young women were

gathered about *Marie Antoinette*, discussing her tawdry magnificence in the musical but merciless Larrabee voices. Young Johnny rummaged among the shadowy dummies like a terrier, touching each chilly wax hand, drawing the swords of *Rodney* and *General Wolfe* an inch or two to see if they were real, peering indelicately under *Britannia's* flowing robe. Black Hagar hung in the offing, eyes all whites, awed beyond words at the uncanny wax company. Nobody was paying attention to the proprietor of Malatesta's Celebrated Waxworks but Colonel Larrabee, who was paying a little too much. Malatesta wondered if the Larrabees were sample of an Oldport audience.

In desperation he drew attention to the *pièce de résistance*—"Ees royal majesty *Keeng Chortch!* Our gitt-ra-ciose Sovereign!"

The effect was magical. In a little rush the Larrabees gathered loyally to view their king.

"He really looks like this?" Sumter murmured in subdued tones—for it seemed a little indecent to be discussing His Majesty before His Majesty's face in this way.

"Malatesta's Celebrated Waxwork," said the Signor profoundly, "ees model from life."

"Taller than me, begad—and me six foot!"

"Yes, signor. Verree tall. Verree grrrand."

"A little mad, they say," observed Arabella coolly.

"Bella!" chorused her sisters, a little harmony of disapproving notes.

Sumter examined the large calm face. "I see no madness there," he observed with the air of a physician "Strength rather—strength in every line. And courage, my dear. No man, that, to be ruffled by a passing storm. The fit head of a great nation, begad, with that face and build. Look closely, now. Ye may never have the chance again in a lifetime—as good as seeing the King himself. Something to tell your children!" And to the proprietor, kindly: "The show's an education, sir, and a credit to you." The delighted Malatesta bowed, and bowed again. He motioned gracefully toward *Julius Caesar*; but Sumter—fierce old Loyalist—was not to be moved so easily from his king.

"A good face," he went on, nodding amiably at King George. "A firm face. Resolution's the word—resolution all over the face."

"Eh?" squeaked Signor Malatesta.

"Resolution, sir! All over the face!"

"Ah! Yes, yes, signor. Sooblime!"

Something—was it relief?—passed over the proprietor's face, but his olive countenance held a tallowy tinge, and Sumter's daughters surveyed him curiously for a moment.

"I fought hard for him, sir," Sumter declared, his keen black eyes fixed on the royal face. "Gave up home, fortune, everything for him; suffered persecution, and shed my blood for him. Never regretted it. Proud of it. Look at him! A man, sir, a man! D'ye know, I'd pictured somehow a fat Germanish sort o' fellow."

HE allowed himself to be diverted to *Britannia*—"A true copy, signor, and young leddies and you, too, leetle boy over there—a true copy of the Brithanya design by the beauty-fool Lady 'Amilton when she welcomes back the gre't h'Admiral Nelson to Napoli from hees gloriose vectory of the Nile!"

"Wonder which he welcomed most—the lady or *Britannia*?" Arabella said tartly.

"Nelson!" snorted Sumter.

"All the fleet knows—all the world. It's the talk of Halifax."

"Gossip! Let's have no more of it. Who's that over there?"

Malatesta led the way with his side-long bow and splendid gestures, but there was an interruption. Young Johnny Hampton waved a card.

"Hi! Colonel Larrabee, sir! Here's furrin writin's!"

Signor Malatesta moved swiftly, but Flora's hand was quicker.

"*Jeanne d'Arc*," she read aloud. "That's French, Johnny."

"Ahl!" roared the apprentice, dancing all about the flustered Malatesta with an accusing finger. "He's bloody Crapaw! He's a spy, that's what!"

"Give me the thing," demanded Sumter. "And you, John Hampton, mind your language. Now, what have we here?" He examined the card.

"*Jeanne d'Arc*, signor. Means nothing, signor."

"That may be. Where'd ye find it, Johnny?"

"Stuck under the back o' her gown—that 'un there, the lady wi' the yeller night-cap and the hay-fork."

"That's *Britannia*, idiot! Kate, see what's under *General Wolfe's* coat."

Catherine fumbled, and drew forth a card like the one in Sumter's hand. "*Marquis de Lafayette*."

The girls could see the Colonel's hackles rising.

"Priscilla—you're nearest—see about *Admiral Rodney*."

Priscilla, most prim of the Larrabee daughters, rummaged in the admiral's coat-skirts with distaste. She held a card to the candle-light.

"*Admiral John Paul Jones*."

THUNDER loomed in Sumter's face, Signor Malatesta cringed.

"Well, sir," uttered Colonel Larrabee grimly, "what's the meaning of all this?"

The Signor dropped a look at the strong fingers twitching on the stout ash stick. His narrow shoulders rose to his ears and fell hopelessly. In a thin voice he said monotonously: "I geev you the truth, signor. I model the waxwork. Ees true, signor. Een Parees when comes the revolution I 'ave some waxwork I show for a few sous—*Keeng Louis*, *Quin Marie Antoinette*, *Jeanne d'Arc*, *Cardinal Richelieu*. Een the revolution, ees no good, eh? I lose my 'ead, eh? So! I change, signor, the card, the clo'es. I make one wooden guillotine; I put *Louis Capet* een there, and *Marie Capet* waiting 'er turn. The people like that, eh? The *Cardinal*, 'e becomes *Citizen Robespierre*. One mus' live, signor. But soon ees no monney in Parees any more. I go 'ome to Napoli. Ees no good. So I come to Amereeca. Good! But *Robespierre*—no, no! An' *Jeanne d'Arc*—oo ees she? I change 'er clo'es, I call 'er *Leeberty*. *Robespierre* I make into *Benjameen Franklin*. People come to see. Good! I get more wax, make more figure."

"Ha! And when ye come to His Majesty's provinces, sir, what becomes o' the citizen *Robespierre-Franklin*?"

Silently, Malatesta pointed to *Julius Caesar*.

"Egad! And *Liberty's* now *Britannia*!"

"Yes, signor."

"And *Lafayette* is *General Wolfe*?"

"Yes, signor."

"And *Paul Jones*—*Admiral Rodney*?"

"Yes, signor."

"Dammie," Sumter said, "it's ingenious."

He noticed a profound silence and found them all watching him—Malatesta, his daughters, Johnny, and black Hagar. Then it dawned on him. Out he strode and confronted the waxen

"Since when has a gentleman from Carolina demeaned himself by insulting a dead enemy?"



ranks like a sergeant-major addressing defaulters. He indicated *King George* with his stick, and the stick shook.

"And who, sir—don't lie to me, dammel—who's that?"

"Signor!" faltered Mario Malatesta.

"Out with it!"

"Ah, signor, signor!"

"The truth, or begad, sir—"

It was *King George* whom Sumter menaced with the uplifted stick, but Signor Malatesta cringed, and his face was very pale.

"*Chortch*"—he choked on the fatal name—"Chortch *Vashington*, signor."

"What!"

"From life. Een *Pheeladelphia*, signor."

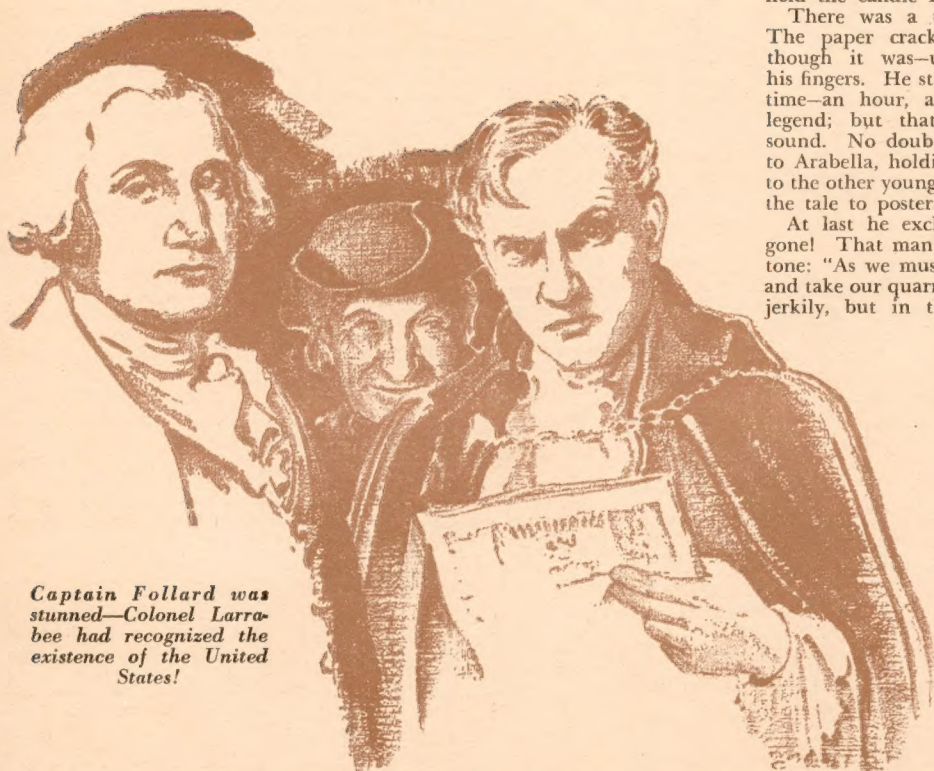
The young women fled to the fireplace and opened their cloaks, glad to turn their backs upon the chilly room and its uncomfortable tableau. Black Hagar and Johnny stared, and Malatesta gibbered, when the Colonel raised his stick—as he might have raised his saber twenty years before

and praised God for the chance. But he paused, with his black eyes ablaze and was heard to say, "Pshaw! A lump of wax!" and began to pace the floor with great strides, cloak flapping behind like a spilled sail, stick striking hollow thunder from the boards at every step. The partition door opened at the sound, and the foreign Negro put a curious head inside.

Sumter marked the intrusion with a flourish of the ash.

"Tell that blackamoor to keep his nose out o' this!"

Malatesta yapped something in falsetto Italian, and the head vanished.



Captain Follard was stunned—Colonel Larrabee had recognized the existence of the United States!

Sumter resumed his patrol from Washington to the door, from the door to Washington, and on each journey down the floor his eyes fastened upon the calm wax face, as if to shrivel the thing with a look. Once he glanced at his girls; but they had found a Boston newspaper, weeks old, brought in the *Betsey* along with Malatesta's "Raree show," and were clustered about it, four charming faces together in the light of the mantelpiece candles. Malatesta he ignored.

SUDDENLY he paused, demanding: "Why, man, did ye bring this—this treasonable sham, this waxen swindle—to Oldport, of all places?"

Huskily Signor Malatesta murmured: "Een Boston ees 'ard in the weenter. People say, Go to 'Alcefax, where ees the Engleesh Prence Edward, many soldier, good Engleesh guinea, good times. So—I come. The Captain Rington breengs me 'ere first. Signor, I am a peaceful man; I no weesh to offend the good people of Keeng Chortch, so I chenge the card. *Ecco!* One mus' live, signor."

"False pretences, damme!"

Malatesta did not know what pretences were, but in Colonel Larrabee's tones they had a jail-door sound. He fell upon his thin breeched knees and washed his hands upward in great

fear. But the Colonel was marching again. The truth was that Colonel Larrabee burned not so much with the old bitterness—sixteen busy years in Nova Scotia had mellowed that—as a strong suspicion that he had made himself ridiculous in the eyes of the foreigner. He was not a man who could laugh that off; his sense of humor was not geared to such strains. And because Signor Malatesta was the cause of his embarrassment, it seemed just that Signor Malatesta should suffer for it.

Sumter halted abruptly and roared: "Give me a reason—one, sir!—why I shouldn't call in my privateersman and have you and your fraudulent graven images thrown out in the snow?"

The proprietor of the waxworks answered with a thin wail. The group by the fire opened suddenly, crying, "Father!" indignantly. And Arabella—the Colonel's favorite—swept toward him with the newspaper in one hand and a candlestick in the other. She had an instinct for dramatics.

"Since when," demanded Arabella, "has a gentleman from Carolina demeaned himself and his king by insulting a dead enemy?"

"Eh? Dead be damned!"

"Dead! At Mount Vernon, three weeks ago." She thrust the rolled

newspaper under Sumter's nose, and held the candle for his reading.

There was a tremendous silence. The paper crackled—old and limp though it was—under the grip of his fingers. He stared at it for a long time—an hour, according to family legend; but that has an excessive sound. No doubt it seemed so long to Arabella, holding the candle, and to the other young women who passed the tale to posterity.

At last he exclaimed: "So! He's gone! That man!" And in a lower tone: "As we must all go, I suppose, and take our quarrels with us." Then, jerkily, but in the subdued voice:

"I'd no love for him—not I, damme!—but I take back nothing I said o' that image there. Resolution he had, and courage—yes, and faith, the kind that moves mountains, according to the scriptures. He needed it—the rebel Congress was mountain enough to break any man's heart.

"He was proud, they say, proud as a king—a bit too proud for some of 'em. But then the mantle o' the levelers never did sit well on a Virginian. And now he's gone! Died hard, it says, as if that were something strange. Lived hard, didn't he? So lived we all. Fighting times! Fighting times! Well, here's an end to the chapter, and what's left? Wax, wax, to be changed by the scrawl of a card. There were men in those days. So it goes."

He addressed this to nobody in particular, unless it were *General Washington*, tall and impassive before him. The news had thrown Sumter into what Flora always called his graveyard mood, when doubt of the new generation rose bitter as bile to his tongue. But in the end, in a voice cold as the weather outside, he said: "You may show these things to the people, sir."

"Signor!"

"But no more humbug! Let 'em be seen for what they are. We live, sir, in an age of enlightenment, and a free country."

"Ah, signor!"

"The charge not to exceed sixpence a head, lawful money, or the equivalent in currency."

"Each afternoon and evening," suggested the signor, riding the tide.

"Bar Sunday. But I'll have no interference with the working habits of our people, sir. Let's see—gets dusk at four, dark at five—um!—you may exhibit your images between the hours of four in the afternoon and

eight in the evening. Any disorder, for whatever cause, will be upon your head. Is that clear?"

"I understand, signor," whispered Malatesta, wondering when the packet left for Halifax.

Beyond the partition door Sumter crooked a finger, and Captain Follard came.

"You will kindly hoist your flag at half-mast on the *Venture*, Follard, and notify the other ships in port. I am sending word to the battery."

"Very good, sir," answered Follard; and diffidently: "Who's dead?"

Sumter squared his shoulders, as if to challenge all argument.

"General Washington, the—the late President of the United States."

With that he turned, and the Larra-bees marched out in a stark silence that chilled the taproom like a frost. Behind them as young Johnny closed the tavern door, they heard the rush of eager feet toward the gaudy Negro and his guarded mysteries. But Captain Follard did not move, for he was stunned by an incredible fact. It was not that an elderly American soldier lay dead in far away Virginia. It was that Colonel Larabee—"Saber" Larabee of Tarleton's Legion—had recognized at last, by official act, the existence of the United States!

OUR NEW CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by Albert H. Morehead

This crossword puzzle is something of a novelty, in that it offers a challenge to the imagination rather than a test of your vocabulary.

That is to say, the difficulty is not in the words themselves, but in the definitions. The main types used are the anagram, the enigma,

the hidden word and—for variety and to keep you guessing—some straight dictionary definitions. (Solution on page 90.)

ACROSS

1 Be less tame, or throw in confusion?

9 Desire to dwell here?

15 She ate at last, though trying to reduce

16 Eve and Eden almost got square

17 Wife, darn my socks neatly

18 Forecast the result—I'd follow your bet

19 Walters' pitch is high, inside

20 An insect's trig lines

22 Fair figure for a net return

23 Describes the results of his golf shots dishonestly

25 Low numbers in a state of confusion

26 Make limited with a mild deduction

27 Nailed down, I quit

29 So start back for the West

30 M. P. finishes his patrol

32 Acids are sweets

34 For preparing her tea

35 Mike's sidekick draws the shells

38 "Go thy ways to a —," *Hamlet*

39 Supported in a duplex by exchanging H

40 Tries to establish customs

41 Makes strained and is out

42 Dry commission

43 Tribe turns yellow

47 The successful candidates are involved in crime

48 The thatching won't dovetail when you cut the lea

50 I increase the tariff for the hack

51 Miss Chase is the same at first

52 The Babylonians changed, it seems

54 I will make the offer in the same place

55 The motor idles, and more

57 Isle bank can be under water

59 This register shows some turnover at last

60 He won't permit sale of the lea I rent

61 Goddess is at the root of summery words

62 Take less repose and you'll be finding no repose

DOWN

1 Occur, autumn

2 Iago's wife

3 Emmet came in to marry, yet was absent

4 Frozen plates and ceilings have one thing in common

5 I first would cover my eyes

6 Braves are surrounded

7 Erasmians (sic) in a backward state

8 Polishes again so it glows again

9 Say what you owe and be silent

10 Relics hidden in days before the Vesuvian eruption

11 Notes rise when put down

12 I ate in it, to begin with

13 One who unpledges?

14 Guarded by Cherubim (Gen. iii.24)

21 Old, odd, add, aid, bid, bed, bet, net

24 Make ready for drives to get seats

26 The star's passage in Tristan

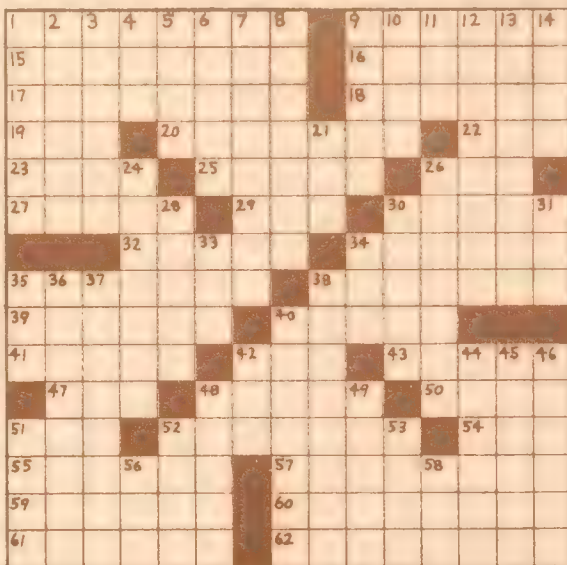
28 Exposes bosses and is slain

30 You might reverse your opinion

31 I didn't raise you to be curious

33 Rested, set out to gain color

34 First part of the brawl's dream



35 Place this short shot toward the cup

36 As in Germinal or Floreal

37 Cadaverous mongrels must be philosophers

38 My Lady —, by James M. Barrie

40 An editor is a reformer forever, sir

42 An eon has passed since the holy man saw the light (Luke ii.32)

44 Bees murmur in the meadow

45 Refugees—from the isles?

46 The railroad fixes a date for its passengers

48 Ravines with farmers in them

49 An indefinite number was let stand around when returning to camp

51 The plan was nearly fatal to Caesar

52 A place begins the punctuation of the Psalms (Is. xvi.1)

53 Keep away from the German game

56 Lush (slang) is set down ungrammatically

58 Being in distress, I get into a veterans' association

GUADALCANAL,

A MATTER of minutes now.

But minutes can be very long when one is dying in mid-air.

The task force had done its work well, but for lack of gas, there was no getting back to the carrier. Many a pilot had gone winging to his death over the Pacific because of this. Now Don Pickett could comprehend it. He was gone too; luckily, he had sighted land. Could he reach it?

The earth was flattening out; sea and land were showing details. Curiously enough Pickett recognized where he was. There had been a lecture in the ready-room two nights ago on these geographical details north and west of the Solomons, purposely to teach the pilots all that was possible before they struck hands with destiny.

The engine sputtered. Damn! Five thousand feet was not enough. Still, a long glide might do it. He could not chance the jungle and hills; better trust to the water and his rubber boat. He craned over, to get a glimpse of the scene.

Nare's Harbor, sure enough. The bitter end of nowhere, the navigating officer had said at the lecture—God! How true that was now, to Pickett! Here was the last of those islands off the New Guinea coast that began with the Solomons. This was the Admiralty group, mostly reefs. That would be Manus Island; directly south of Guam, it lay. And Nare's Harbor—that was an odd thing to call a harbor; just a patch of open sea off of Manus Island, with reefs and islets closing it in!

These coasts were practically unknown. Except for the tiny trading-stations and occasional missionaries, whites were rare, the shores were uncharted. Mariners kept away. Pilots kept away too, if they could—his kind of pilot, a new kind in these waters and airs. He grinned to himself at the thought. The Wildcat was in a long glide now; her engine had gone dead; her struts were whining like wireless voices. This was it, then.

Below and ahead, he beheld the scene with perfect clarity of recognition, thanks to the lecture. The long harbor was formed by the shore of Manus Island to the south; this was the north shore of the fifty-mile-long island that was almost a blank space in man's knowledge. To the westward lay a tremendous reef on which were three islands. Their names jumped at him from that lecture

he had heard; queer names: Aawa, Browne, Okoru. A trading-station had been there. No one knew what existed there now.

The north side of this great harbor was formed by another extensive reef, Marengan by name. It, with its islets, had some inhabitants; a native village. Maybe none now. There was the alleged harbor, at edge of the open sea, protected from wind and wave by coral reefs on every hand. To the south, Manus Island itself, overgrown, rugged, no place to land. Try the sea and perhaps the beach, if there was any.

Pickett's eyes saw all these things; but his brain was reaching back and afar, his thoughts, in this instant of down-plunging flight, fluttering away into the world he had left behind. The Michigan town with its towering trees and spacious homes along the main street, and his father's house with the hydrangeas fronting the porch; and his father, gray and kindly-eyed, mowing the lawn these fine fall days, and his mother knitting—well, it was going to be tough for them. Just as well that Maggie Helm had married that training-camp officer when the wings had been slow to come. All that world was gone, and the hell with it! Here was the sun glinting up at him from the glare of water below—damn the sun! Ah, but one shouldn't say that, when one might so soon see it no more. . . .

"Hal Wake up, you dumb-bell!" cried out Pickett furiously. "You're all right—make a safe landing, inflate your boat and paddle ashore! You've got six minutes to work before the Wildcat sinks! You're all right if you use your fool head!"

Still, it was a flash of death, and sobering. Plenty of other fellows had met the same end, with fuel failing. And some of those R.A.F. chaps went out with only enough fuel for a few minutes of fighting—and no coming back at all. Why, this game was a cinch compared with what some of the boys faced!

The water and the reefs, the white curl of surf, were rushing up at him now. Over yonder looked like a sub lying on the bottom; just another coral patch, of course. If there were any Japs here, goodnight! What had the Major said just the other day?

"Don't count on staying alive if you have to flop near any Japs. Better use your sidearm and finish fighting, than have them machine-gun your doughnuts; mighty little mercy in this man's war. Go down fighting and expect the worst."

Ah—was that a sandy strip ahead, near that black rock? Hell, no! The rock was a cliff on the shore. That was a stretch of flat coral or rock, close to it; keep clear! Looked like a stream of water near the cliff, though. Well, here he was—take it and pray for luck . . . *whoosh!*

The forbidding shore, with its high spiky hills behind, rose like a wall of jungled green. Hardly any beach at all; it was high tide here, no doubt. And now Don Pickett worked like fury. The little old Wildcat was down; she sighed and gurgled and tucked wings and cockpit under, fifty yards from shore.

Pickett tripped the lever that released the rubber doughnut. Floating beside it, he opened the attached bottle of compressed CO₂, and the yellow doughnut billowed out into shape. He crawled aboard, seized a paddle and headed for shore. Why, it was like a damned ferry landing only for your heart turning over a couple times! Into the boat and here you were, and here was the shore, a strip of beach after all. And so out, safe and sound, and laugh at the frenzied peril of the skies!

PICKETT did not laugh at all; that was just a thought-impulse. He stepped out, pulled the doughnut up on the sand, and got rid of his parachute pack. It felt good to be himself again. He stretched luxuriously. It was over. For a while, anyway, he was out of the war and had new things to think about. Good idea, too; he needed a change of environment.

He stared about curiously, then stalked toward the stream, conscious of intense thirst. If his descent had been seen, if anyone were about here, they would show up; first a drink, then get some better security than this open beach.

He knelt and tried the water; it was sweet and clear. He drank with gusto. Straightening up, he wiped his lips and his gaze darted around. He remained motionless, startled, as he

A strange drama of the Pacific today

BEARING S.E.

eyed the sand close by. Here were marks, all sorts of marks; he tried to account for them. Footsteps, certainly; cigarette stubs, a long gash made by a boat's keel. Round marks like barrels. Hal! It was plain that a boat had landed here, filling water-casks. Well, so much was clear. When? No telling—perhaps at the last high tide.

"Watch your step," he murmured, reached for his cigarettes, and lit one. "Too bad we had strict orders not to radio any report. That leaves me out on a limb, looks like."

He went back to the rubber boat, collapsed it, and carried it up out of the sun, stowing it beneath the nearest trees; mangroves, with high twisted roots. That looked like swamp. Too bad. He had his pistol, iron rations, flashlight, first-aid kit.

There was no use thinking about Manus Island; those sharp, conical peaks made him shiver. To the three

To Pickett, it was as though an octopus had him in its tentacles. His blows had no effect.



by Michael Gallister

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

Pickett seized a paddle and headed for shore. Why, it was like a ferry landing—into the boat and here you were!



westward islands was about five miles. At a pinch, he could try for them in the rubber boat; the trading-station might afford refuge. He looked at the black cliff. It was a hundred feet high, sticking sharply out from the greenery, a bleak projection of rock.

Pickett approached it, carrying everything he had, with the idea of finding some place of shelter and hiding. This idea lessened, as he came under the dark rock wall. The tide was going out; here was a little sand beneath the cliff, firm and hard, and a projection of low rock like a seat. Pickett sat down there, wondering at himself.

A curious sensation had come over him. It was, perhaps, due to the reaction consequent upon his recent activities; his usually clear and acute perceptions were dulled. He felt it quite useless to go on struggling; he had done his utmost, he had played the game out, and now someone else, some other force, must go on with it.

"It's like something had stopped," he muttered, frowning and perplexed. "I've got to make some plans, decide on something. . . . But what the devil! A chap has to front this silence and sea and sunlight with his bare hands, and what can he do? I can't start out and walk to Brisbane!"

Realization of his helplessness, of his awful futility, of his solitude, burst over him like a wave. He was no longer riding the air, master of events; he was a man lost. This despondency

was natural, but it was hard to endure. The afternoon was half gone. What would happen with the night? Suddenly he laughed.

"What! Little boy lost and ready to go bust?" he jeered. "Snap out of it, you! Be your age!"

He eyed the dark, savage wall of green rising into the sky behind him with acute loathing; he feared this mystery. The impulse came to take the boat out and leave, and head toward the three islands with the queer names, over yonder, where the trading-station was or had been. This stream of fresh water where boats had put in—why, sure! He remembered that from the lecture, too. One place in Nares Harbor where fresh water could be obtained. This was it. No secret, either. Someone had been here. Natives? Japs? Or a U. S. task force?

He rose. As he did so he heard a casual, unhurried, friendly voice:

"So there you are, Lieutenant! Glad to see you're safe and well."

Pickett looked around. He saw no one; there was no stir of leaf or underbrush.

"Who's there?" he demanded, inexpressibly startled. "Where are you?"

No answer. The only sound was the long hollow booming reverberation of the surf rolling in across the reefs; it seemed to fill the air and exclude all else. Uneasy, half afraid he might be fancying things, Pickett fingered his holster.

"I was afraid of that," spoke up the voice suddenly. "You can't shoot a voice; that's why I'm staying put."

Between vast relief and amusement, Pickett burst into a laugh that echoed up the black cliff.

"All right, all right, I won't shoot!" he cried out. "For the love of Pete come on out and show yourself! I thought I was *Crusoe* on his island!"

White and lean, a man stepped from the undergrowth and came toward him. A man in whites, leggings, and boots; an erect, tall man whose clean-shaven features were queerly wrinkled and lined. There was more than this to him, but Pickett did not absorb it at once.

"You're welcome," said the stranger, extending his hand gravely. "My name's Flinders. I saw you come down and get ashore. Scared the daylight out of me."

"Oh!" Pickett introduced himself. "This is a surprise. You seem to take it in a matter-of-fact way. You were not, by any chance, expecting me?"

His pleasantry was lost. Flinders regarded him with searching blue eyes that held no mirth, though pleasant and warm enough.

"As a matter of fact, I was," he replied.

"Eh?" Pickett's nerves jumped. Did this fellow joke with a dead pan like that? "So you're having a bit of fun with me, are you?"

"Certainly not," stated Flinders. "I did not expect you personally, understand. But Narraga told me a couple of hours ago that we were to have a visitor, and of course he knows."

"Of course," murmured Pickett, then caught himself up short. "Say, what is this? You knew I was coming before I knew it myself? Or you expected somebody else?"

"Oh, no! An American lieutenant, Narraga said." And Flinders smiled. "Don't look so struck of a heap, my dear fellow! Really it's quite simple."

"You're telling me!" said Pickett helplessly. "Did you materialize out of thin air or just drop over from the Waldorf-Astoria to welcome me?"

FLINDERS could laugh, after all. His eyes twinkled, and he clapped Pickett heartily on the shoulder.

"I see, I see!" he exclaimed, chuckling away. "You know, really, I'm frightfully glad you're here. I was just thinking last night that I'd give anything to see a white face, to have a man here I could talk with, to be in touch with the world again!"

"What's your friend Narraga? Some wooden image?" demanded Pickett.

"No. He's a witch-doctor. Now, if you'll step along with me, we'll get back up the trail and see about starting dinner—we usually go to bed with the sun, hereabouts. I think we can

manage some roast pheasant, if that'll suit your fancy; our fowls are all gone, I'm sorry to say. Or if you'd prefer pig, we can have that. Plenty of yams, of course."

Pickett shook his head, pinched his ear, and decided he was wide awake.

There was no trail; then suddenly there was one, a tiny one, scarcely visible. Pickett followed his guide, who talked volubly.

"There was Jap infiltration everywhere, you know, far before the war. I used to be on the trading-station, on the islands; came here a year ago. They knew it was coming."

"Who did?" Pickett asked.

"The blacks—some of them, anyhow. The Japs came and wiped out their villages with machine-guns. Narraga had foretold it. There are over thirty with us—the best of the lot."

"Who's us?" asked Pickett.

"Me and Hansen, my partner. Hansen's been dead quite a while, but sticks around. You see, Narraga is an exceptional sort of sorcerer, even among these natives. He and Hansen planned the withdrawal to this hidden valley in the hills. It certainly saved us, too; when we skipped out at the last, we were not an hour ahead of the Japs."

Don Pickett made no mistakes. He had to watch that almost invisible path under his feet with the greatest care; he was treading another sort of path with this man Flinders, and had to watch that, too. He listened and voiced no comments, while Flinders told about it.

The coming of the barbarians had been foreseen. With a chosen few of the blacks, the finest specimens of the race, Flinders had moved into a nook among the hills at this end of the big island. Here they were quite safe. There was no Jap occupation, for there was nothing to occupy; no need for an airfield here and no place to put one.

Here the trader and his blacks had been, ever since, cut off from the world, existing as usual. This spoke volumes for the man's stamina and force of character. As to Hansen and the spirit guides—well, that was another matter. It might or might not verge upon madness.

Pickett, ever since coming to this part of the world, had been absorbing strange and interesting facts; chiefly about the Solomons and their far-flung chain of allied islands. About the island sorcerers were told weird things as regarded their dealings with spirits, both good and bad. Indeed, it was said that an actual college for sorcerers still existed secretly. Even the whites took the native sorcerers very seriously. So it was not surprising that Flinders did so.

"Narraga will probably meet us at any minute," said Flinders over his

shoulder. "Don't be nervous. He usually has a coral snake or two in his hair, but they're well trained. The blacks have a purpose, you know, in teasing out their fuzzy hair into regular cartwheels."

"After running out of gas over the broad Pacific," said Pickett, "it takes more than a coral snake to make a fellow nervous."

This was plain brag to keep up his own morale. Coral snakes were deadly; this jungle and the talk of Flinders already had him jittery, but he was resolved to hide the fact. Meantime, he had been studying this guide of his, with growing interest.

TO judge from his appearance, Flinders was no beachcomber but a neat, conservative, amiable chap, not particularly forceful, not given to nonsense-rhymes, either. If he said a thing was so, he believed it. The leathery features were high-boned and well balanced. A man in his forties, of education, of remarkable poise. Perhaps a remittance man; his speech carried a slight English intonation, rather than accent.

Flinders halted. Here was an opening that widened amid the green walls; here stood Narraga holding a spear, slender and deadly as a lance. He was stalwart, magnificently built, naked except for clay spiraled on his body like paint and dried there. His features expressed intelligence and force, though to Pickett's eye all these aborigines looked alike.

The hair—that was what caught his attention; it might have concealed one or a dozen reptiles. It was enormously bushy out in a frizzy mass and there was a lot of it. Bone skewers stuck through it; necklaces of bones and shells were strung over the painted and tattooed chest.

"How do?" said Narraga. Flinders spoke.

"This is Lieutenant Pickett, Narraga. American."

"Sure," said Narraga. "Good."

He moved and seemed to melt into the green leaves; he was gone with a flowing motion like a reptile. Pickett stared at nothing.

"So he approves you," Flinders commented. "Come along."

"If you saw me come down," said Pickett, "didn't the Japs see me likewise?"

"No Japs here now," Flinders replied. "Nares Harbor is used by subs, mostly. There's quite a stock of fuel over at the islands, where my trading-station was. Subs come in here for fresh water, for fuel, and to recharge batteries. Sometimes they're surfaced for a day or two at a time."

"Good Lord! And you don't do anything about it?"

Flinders turned. "What do you expect us to do? We've nothing to do

anything with. A plane would come and bomb us to nothing, if we tried. A live dog's better than a dead lion."

Pickett made no response, and they went on in silence. The path was more visible now, a real path; they climbed and descended but never got away from the walls of green hemming them in. Nothing was in sight except the thread of blue sky overhead.

From this they emerged suddenly, when Pickett was wiping sweat from his face. They stepped out on a shelf of rock, in the open. Before them was a little vale under the sky, bright with banana trees, crossed with taro and yam patches. Flinders pointed to dark shadows under the wall of green, at the sides.

"There's my house, and the men's house and the other native buildings. The camouflage is perfect. Have a cigarette? Oh, I have plenty. I've replenished my stock once or twice; the Japs leave supplies of everything over at the island station. They come in handy." He gave Pickett a sharp look. "A queer expression you have; a penny for your thoughts."

"Okay," said Pickett, lighting the cigarette. "I was thinking about a guy back home in Michigan. He opened a fortune-telling joint in our town. He had been in Tibet and had a grand line of patter; used to talk out the side of his mouth to the spirits standing behind him."

He paused.

"Yes?" prompted Flinders.

"Oh, they put him in the bughouse finally. He had quite a record, too."

Flinders broke into a laugh. "I don't blame you a mite, old chap! When I first came out, it took me a long time to accept the reality of native sorcery. It's an odd fact that these island blacks, here and in the Solomons and in parts of Papua, should be really accomplished spiritists! Like the voodoo people in Haiti and the Zulus in Africa."

"Those Australian blackfellows don't play with the spirits, do they?" said Pickett. "They're about the lowest type of humanity I've ever seen."

"You're right there. No, they don't go in for sorcery. Yet these fellows of ours are confounded low in the scale; cannibal at times, I believe. Perhaps it's just something that's given them to make up for what they haven't. Well, well, the sun's going—we'd best get ahead. Hansen will have told them to get the dinner started, luckily."

Hansen? Pickett opened his lips to protest that Hansen was dead—but checked the words. It was not his place to start any trouble with his host. If Flinders wanted to swallow all this nonsense, let him. More likely, Flinders was concealing something behind it; or perhaps just trying it on to see how gullible his guest



might be. At this thought, Pickett brightened and began to enjoy himself. The idea of a roast bird was pleasant.

They came down to the cultivated patches and began to cross them, heading for a house almost invisible under the trees at one side. With hills around, with tall trees of all sorts towering into the sky, it was like being at the bottom of a well; no wonder the sun disappeared early!

"Hello! The chief men are out to greet you," murmured Flinders. "Give each one a cigarette from your case. I've plenty of smokes on hand."

This was in an aside. Ahead appeared half a dozen naked black shapes, Narraga among them, lined up as though in a reception committee. Flinders spoke Pickett's name, then that of each native in turn; queer island names—Toru, Mundua, Mbucho, Wuwulu, Narraga, Lumike. The savage eyes looked into his, then stud-

"They say a plane landed over there!" They broke for the house.

ied the magic case that produced cigarettes; he nodded and passed on with Flinders.

They came to the house under the trees that Flinders occupied; it was low, airy, not badly furnished, floored with ironwood poles and gained by a short ladder, not unlike a Dyak house.

EVERYTHING was neat as a pin; Flinders must be a remarkable sort of person, to judge by the way he kept himself and his place up to the tiptop of form, with no slacking anywhere. The house was divided into rooms, too, with partitions of rattan and tapa-cloth. To one of these Flinders took his guest.

"Make yourself comfortable. I expect you'd like to rest a bit; dinner in half an hour, I understand. We're chary with lights here; might be dan-

gerous if any were seen. I'll come for you."

He departed. Don Pickett, with a long sigh of relief, set down his load and stretched out on the pallet along the wall; it even had a mosquito netting suspended from the roof.

"Well, this is scrumptious," he reflected easily. "Looks like I'm out of the war for a while anyway; can't help myself there, I guess. This place—hm! Something cockeyed about it all. Flinders is just a mite too pleasant, too good to be true."

Comfortable? He could not be comfortable, except in body. That morning he had been in one world; now he was in another. His wings were gone. Everything he knew was gone. This lush jungle under the equator frightened him, oppressed him; everything was hideous under its wild beauty. He felt chained and prisoned, a tiny mite enclosed by hills and giant trees. This feeling was not to be thrown off.



Vainly he told himself how lucky he was. No drifting at sea, no peril, no stumbling about unknown shores. All the same, he was unhappy and vaguely alarmed. Perhaps it was that queer talk about spirits; he wondered just how far off balance this man Flinders might be.

Then his host came for him, and he followed to another room of the dark, airy house where a table was set in the twilight. Here were roast birds, yams, a tea-urn, everything civilized from knives and forks to carved plates of beautiful hardwood; even paper napkins and teacups of fine English china. It was a feast, nothing less.

Yet no one else was visible. No one served the meal. It was there, complete, as though conjured out of thin air. Pickett wondered if he was supposed to believe that spirits had arranged it all; but spirits, he reflected, do not wash dishes. This amused him and the hearty meal brought him back to a realistic frame of mind.

So did Flinders, who talked volubly and showed himself a brilliant companion and most friendly; he discussed the war with a depth of knowledge that astonished Pickett, and talked of the island life, of the blacks, of the pleasant days westward on the curving reef-islets.

There was a quiet sureness about the man that Pickett liked. The

twinkling blue eyes were thoroughly alive with humor and zest of life, the brown bony features had a hardness and resolution that was close to cruelty, yet behind all this was a level poise. Flinders never broke into aimless laughter, never voiced aimless "I wish" talk, never was at a loss for words or thoughts; he lived in a certainty of mind, it seemed. A very positive man.

And he dispelled mystery, too. He spoke of himself, of the company he had represented here, of boyhood in England; he had a flattering interest in Pickett as a person—his family and hopes and ambitions. Never once did he mention spirits or his dead partner Hansen. Too many bugs to have lights, he said when they lit cigarettes in the growing darkness; big moths and things—not to mention possible Japs high in the skies. The safest thing was to fall into the habit of sleep with darkness.

THEIR chairs were stools, the table was low and close to the floor, like a Japanese *saki* table. Pickett lit another cigarette. The glow of the match picked up something lying on the mat beside him. In the darkness, he pocketed it, not carelessly nor idly, but with a quick jump of the nerves. Ha! He had found Flinders out—at what? He could not say. He did not refer to it.

The tiny object in his pocket was an ordinary hairpin of crinkly bent wire.

They parted abruptly; Flinders, after talking a while, took him back to his room with a flashlight like his own—he called it an "electric torch," in English fashion—and said good-night. There was a bath, he said, operated by natives; it would be working by morning.

Pickett lay thinking for a while. Of all things, a hairpin! It had fallen on the mat beside him, and not so long ago either. Was this the secret of the astonishing neatness of Flinders and of this place? Perhaps the chap had gone native and was ashamed to let Pickett know and kept his woman hidden away. Still, this did not seem likely. Flinders was not that type at all—

Upon which reflection, Don Pickett fell asleep and dreamed of days in Michigan.

Flinders wakened him to sunlight, pitching a towel at him.

"Come along, Yank, come along! The shower's ready and waiting!"

They passed outside, towels around their waists; behind the house was a canvas shelter, above it a tank in a tree-crotch, a bamboo pipe leading down. Flinders pulled a cord and water deluged them. The water was cold, refreshing, invigorating.

"How did you discover it?" asked Flinders.

Pickett looked at him inquiringly.

"What?"

"About Sally. Hansen tells me you know. Was it guesswork?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Flinders laughed at this, with hearty amusement. But Pickett thought of that hairpin and wondered. Hansen again! Did dead men speak, then, in this place?

However, Flinders made no further reference to the matter. They breakfasted as they had dined, at a table laid and set, without servants. Pickett, resolved not to play into the hand of his host, asked no questions. Instead, he reverted to the subject of the islands.

"You say your former trading-station is a Jap base of supplies. Such as what?"

"Oh, petrol, torpedoes, ammunition and so forth."

"Why haven't you destroyed all that stuff?"

"Self-preservation. In that case they would come after us. We have boats hidden; we can get over there anytime and get what we need. Much more common sense in that, what?"

"Maybe. I'd like to look about over there, if they've left no guards."

"Oh, no need of that! They've bombed and strafed all the trading-stations between here and Rabaul; they think the place is abandoned, and that's pie for us."

"How about taking a run over there, then?"

Flinders nodded. "If you like, and if no Jap sub comes in today. We could run over tonight; the moon's just about at full. That's safer than using a boat by day. Listen!"

Don Pickett had already thrilled to the sound—a thin, high, distant engine-vibration.

"They usually go over, this time in the morning," said Flinders. "But—hello! Here's Sally. She's been looking forward to meeting you. And," he added, softly and earnestly, "don't oppose her in anything, you understand? Nor take too much stock in what she says."

"Why not?" demanded Pickett.

"The poor lass is a bit unfortunate in the head," said Flinders, rising.

That was a lie, and Pickett knew it a moment later.

ALIE, a lie, a lie! He felt the words pounding in his brain, as he shook hands with Sally Flinders, and surprise seized him. She was younger, much younger, than the trader. In her early twenties, he judged. Perhaps, though, Flinders looked older than he was.

She was lithe, cool, trim and neat. She, too, wore whites and leggings. She was slim but full-bosomed, her head was set high, and pride shone in her level eyes. Blue eyes, rather high-

boned features under coiled brownish masses of hair, a quick and impish smile. A surprising sort of woman; the type who would always be surprising in words and actions, in a very pleasant way.

"Good morning," she said. "It's nice to have someone here. My brother tells me you're an American."

Brother, eh? That put matters in a new light. It was absurd for Flinders to invent such abominable lies about this young woman. She had a swift, appraising eye, too.

"It's marvelous to chance upon such a place as this, and such hosts!" Pickett exclaimed. "I don't know how to thank you, and to praise my luck!"

"Not luck," put in Flinders, smiling. "No chance about it. You were guided here."

Pickett saw the swift little leap of her eyes, the flicker; he could have sworn it was fear. Then Flinders went on, with such blessed frankness that Pickett wondered anew at him, for his charm was undeniable.

"Sally stayed out of the way at my advice," he said. "You see, Pickett, this is a bit of a tough place for a woman to find herself. We knew nothing about what sort of chap you might be and so forth. You'll forgive me, I'm sure. Perhaps I'm hypersensitive on the subject. Sally came out to join me here just before things got critical, and there was no way to leave—and here we are. Now, I trust, all's well with us."

"I might have left, but wouldn't," she put in, laughing. "Do you swim, Mr. Pickett? Or Lieutenant Pickett, I should say."

"Don Pickett," he said. "You bet I do! Why?"

She shrugged. "There are no sharks inside the reef. Perhaps, this afternoon?"

"Right," said Flinders. "If all's clear, we'll do it. Pickett, I'm off to do a bit of shooting; no end of birds in these valleys. Like to come along?"

"If you don't mind, no," said Pickett frankly. "To be honest. I don't like these jungles by half. I'd sooner loaf around and get adjusted."

Flinders glanced from one to the other. "As you like. Sally, my dear, I know you'll make our guest at home, so if you'll excuse me I'll get off before the heat of the day."

IT was all so natural that Pickett could scarcely credit what Flinders had said to him before she came. Flinders departed cheerfully, taking a shotgun from a corner of the room and calling to the blacks as he strode away. Sally Flinders dropped into a chair, took a cigarette from the tin on the table, and looked at Pickett—a slow, level survey.

"You seem sane," she said.

"So do you," Pickett smiled as he spoke, but she did not.

"I doubt it at times," she said seriously. "So will you if you're here long."

His smile vanished. "Well, look here; I don't quite know what to make of it all, for a fact. This business about Hansen and so forth. Your brother seems a fine sort."

"He is, or was; that's what hurts." She exhaled, watching the thin smokecloud. "I can set you right on the situation in two words; sheer deviltry. Let's drop it for the moment and have a look around. Before Andrew comes back, we'll go over the situation."

Pickett assented. He was charmed by her capability, by her air of cool efficiency. A damned level-headed woman, he told himself, and there was something cockeyed about anyone who said otherwise, brother or not! There was plenty that was cockeyed about Andy Flinders, it seemed.

She took him over the place. The men's house was strictly *tabu*; the others, with sullen-faced men, laughing women and fat-bellied black babies, had no secrets. Most of the men were away, fishing or hunting. On a hilltop she pointed out a lookout station, from which signals were made on bamboo drums if any Japs were about. Everything was so well camouflaged under the green growths that Pickett found it rather depressing; he was glad when they came back to the house. A distant gunshot and then another were heard.

"Pheasant again for dinner," said she. "One grows rather tired of it." "What do you do with yourself here?" asked Pickett, when they had lit cigarettes.

"Housework. Swim, loaf, sleep—and wait."

"For what?"

"Help. You see, he's rather fine as a general thing; but there's nothing normal here." She was talking about Flinders, he realized abruptly. "It's the sort of thing normal people find horrifying. I'm normal. He used to be; he's not now. It's got hold of him. He sits in the men's house when they have those frightful doings, almost every night. I've lost all influence over him. I'm so bitterly afraid, and I need help."

"Count me in, then," said Pickett. "These boongs of yours don't seem a bad sort."

"Boongs?" she repeated, with a lift of her brows.

"That's what the boys down in New Guinea call 'em—aborigines," he said, smiling. "So your brother has swallowed all this spirit talk whole and gone off the deep end?"

She considered his slang reflectively, and nodded.

"Something like that. You know, there are two kinds of spiritism. The

nice parlor kind like we have in England; and the other kind. This is the other kind, unfortunately. That hideous Narraga—well, don't underestimate him. His sorcery is real; he does work with devils, actual devils. There's no question about its reality.

"I'm not interested in Narraga or his work," said Pickett. "I'm not interested in devils or in spirits, pro or con. I'm interested in getting away from here and back to my job of killing Japs. I'm interested in you, because you're so out of place here. You speak of help; what kind?"

She looked at him. "Getting away; quickly. Anywhere!"

"You mean he won't let you go?"

"Right. And don't scoff, when I say that he'll know all about our conversation, tonight. That man Hansen will tell him."

PICKETT regarded her whimsically. "Oh! The dead chap? The dead do talk, then?"

"Through Narraga, yes," she rejoined, with an air of hopelessness.

Pickett puffed at his cigarette and decided to plunge.

"Listen; I'll come clean to you, Miss Flinders. Here's my mind on the subject: I don't give a damn either way, devils or spirits. Maybe it's real, maybe not. You say it is; all right, then, look at it that way. Your brother can't check up on us until they have their séance or whatever it is, tonight. Right?"

"Yes."

"But he's going over to the islands with me tonight; therefore he can't check up till tomorrow. Therefore, we can take action tonight."

Her eyes widened. Her breath began to come and go more rapidly.

"What action?"

"That's what I want to get at with you. I'm not sticking around this place for weeks and months; not much! Suppose we go to the islands, to the old trading-station. Would we be any better off? Would we have any chance of getting away?"

Her agitation increased. A little color lifted into her cheeks.

"Yes, yes!" She pressed out her cigarette stub and leaned forward, eagerly. "We have a small skiff here, and native boats; nothing else. But we had whaleboats there! And the Japs have boats there too, for use. They come over to the stream here to get fresh water. Oh, we could, we could!"

"Well, I'm no sailor," said Pickett, "but I can navigate, anyhow. I'm game for it if you are; might be a long chance, remember."

"I don't care. Anything, anything would be better than staying here!" she exclaimed passionately. "Oh, I hate this place! There's terror everywhere!"

"Yes, I guess I know how you feel about it. I'd feel the same way if I got stuck here very long. Well, I gather there's no end of stores over there, food and so forth. No water, though?"

"A spring, a small one; not enough to water a ship from."

"Boats aren't ships. Now, what about your brother? Would he skip out if he could?"

She shrank a little. "No. He's—well, he's satisfied. This awful sorcery has taken hold of him."

"All right, then," Pickett nodded. "It's a go—sink or swim, win or lose! And you're like me, free; he can't stop us going and he won't. He'd better not try."

"But he won't let me go over there tonight."

"Never mind. You're going. Don't have any argument beforehand; when we go, you just show up and leave the rest to me."

"I'll do it." She rose. "He'll be back soon. After lunch, a swim; and say nothing. Oh, you don't know what this means to me—just to get away!"

She departed. Pickett looked after her, admiring her free, lithe step, her fine carriage, the woman herself; his admiration was impersonal, a little pitying. He felt sorry for her. A brave, splendid creature, he told himself; she deserved better of fate.

He was still sitting there when Flinders showed up, hot and sweaty.

"Well, got some fowl and a couple of monkeys; make excellent stew." Dropping into a chair, the trader bared his head and mopped it. "Where's Sally?"

"Search me," Pickett replied lazily. "Did you say monkeys?"

Flinders laughed. "Sure; you'll come to appreciate them. One of those blacks is an excellent cook. Sally takes care of the table. I suppose she talked about me?"

Pickett yawned. "Can't say that she did. Seemed curious about the war and how our forces are doing in the Solomons. She impressed me as being fed up with it here."

"Poor old girl, it's tough on her," said Flinders with sympathy, but seemed satisfied and changed the subject.

Pickett examined him critically. In the light of what he had learned, he was conscious that the man had a certain cunning, an air of knowing far more than he let on; from this might come his poise, as though he felt so completely in command here that he did not need to advertise the fact.

That there was any actual danger in Flinders, struck him as absurd. The man might be far off base where this native sorcery was concerned, but he was not the violent type. He might make trouble, yes, but he could be

handled by the right man. So Pickett left off worrying until the time came to worry; an excellent rule. . . .

Sally Flinders joined them at an excellent light luncheon. During the siesta hour Pickett examined a few books he discovered in the living-room of the house; one of these dealt with the islands, and he pored over the map enclosed. The prospect of making a boat trip was something to think twice about.

In a bee-line, Guadalcanal lay almost due southeast, but in between lay plenty to spoil such a bee-line. It was impossible to know where Japs might be, or where some U. S. task force might be operating. He decided, finally, that the safest course would be to hit due south, raise the coast of New Guinea, and skirt it to the southeastward. This would fetch Bougainville and the Solomons, with luck.

It was sheer madness, and he knew it perfectly well. But to remain here, he now perceived, also meant sheer madness in a more literal and terrifying sense. Don Pickett was not the man to accept hard destiny and make the best of it; he had to be up and doing, at any risk. He had come yesterday; he must go today or possibly never—to do the unexpected, to seize the first chance that offered, seemed the most sensible thing under the circumstances. Otherwise, he could foresee no end of complications and vexations.

THE swim that followed, off the creek-mouth and within the little reef that circled the shore, a quarter-mile away, was memorable. Flinders provided trunks, his sister had an improvised bathing-suit that answered all essential purposes: the more essen-

tial in that a flock of black folk clustered on the shore, watching.

Pickett remembered, later, that it was high tide at the time, a detail of importance. No details mattered, at the moment. The water was gloriously warm, and the three of them sported about in high fettle. They had swum over to the reef and were diving for coral sprays when Sally Flinders drew their attention to the black men, who were dancing about on the sand in high excitement. Something had happened, obviously. There was no indication of any sharks about. All three made for the island; Flinders, a superb swimmer, drew out in front and won the race easily. He was standing on the shore talking with Narraga and the others when Pickett and Sally came splashing in through the shallows. He turned to them.

"Did you see anything of a plane, Pickett?"

"A plane? Good Lord, no! I'd have heard it if there was one. Why?"

"They say that a plane landed while we were out there."

"Landed? Where?"

"Over at the islands."

Pickett frowned. "Impossible! I tell you we'd have heard it, or I would!"

"They're insistent. Come along—let's dress, get the binoculars and go up on the hill. We can settle it quickly enough. They're not apt to be mistaken."

"We weren't paying much attention," Pickett admitted.



Binoculars brought up two men, Japs, in aviation togs; one of them seemed injured.



A searchlight swept the beach; drums of fuel oil were broken out. The sub was re-fueling.

They broke for the house. A quick shower, a hurried dressing, and Pickett followed his host and two of the blacks along a trail at speed. The trail led them up a spiky hilltop behind the shore; a steep trail that took the tucker out of them. At the crest was a thatched and camouflaged shelter which overlooked the whole vast stretch of Nares Harbor. The little string of westward islets showed clear and distinct in the afternoon sunlight.

The blacks jabbered. Flinders looked through the binoculars; Pickett stared at the three islets, which he now saw in detail for the first time. All three were low, flat and thickly wooded. Aawa and Browne were connected by a strip of land, on which he could see buildings. There was no sign of any plane. Then Flinders passed him the binoculars.

"Look at Okoru, the one by itself—the north end. There's a shoal just off there, a coral reef barely awash. There they are, on the north end—"

There they were, indeed; excitement seized Pickett, as the binoculars brought up each tiniest detail. Two men, Japs, in aviation togs; one of them seemed injured. They were in clear sight on the north end of the islet, where there was no brush. Apparently exhausted, they stretched out in the warm sand.

Pickett's breath came hard. Japs! No plane in sight; still, it must be there, perhaps hidden by the trees. A plane for the taking! Who the devil would bother with a boat?

"Well, that puts a quietus on our excursion over there tonight," said Flinders, as they started back toward the house. "The blacks say that a plane came down without any noise on a long glide."

"Those Japs ran out of gas, sure," said Pickett. "And we're going over there—or I am, anyhow; if you don't like the notion, I'll take along a couple of your blacks; they'll jump at the chance to finish off a brace of Nips!"

"Easy!" said Flinders thoughtfully. "It's against all regulations to arm the blacks."

"If it wasn't for your blasted Aussie regulations, the boongs would've cleaned out the Nips when they first landed on New Guinea!"

"Keep your shirt on. I haven't said I'd not go. Those chaps are on Okoru; the trees must hide their plane. They can't get to the station on the other island unless they swim."

"And we'll make for the other island as soon as the sun's down, before the moon's up. Once there, I can swim over and raid 'em. You'd better clean those Japs away before they get to nosing around and learning too much about you, or they'd soon find that this place isn't abandoned by a good deal."

Pickett was arguing to break down resistance, and apparently succeeded. He dared not voice what lay in his mind about a plane. The thought of it choked him with excitement.

By the time they reached the house and met Sally and gave her the news, Pickett saw that Flinders had reached decision and was for it. Instantly he caught the man on the bounce, as it were; here was the instant to exert authority, take command, push it all across!

"Can you sail a boat, Miss Flinders?" he asked.

She smiled. "Rather."

"Good! Then we'll take her along, Flinders. There'll be no danger for her, and we may be thankful to have

a third hand in case of need, especially with the skiff. It's only a couple of miles over there. If those two Japs really have a plane drawn up on the shore, we may get no end of information; may find some good loot, too. You won't mind going with us, Miss Flinders?"

"Oh, I'd like it," she said brightly. "I'll go see about dinner right now, Andrew. We'll want to get away as soon as the sun's down, for the moon will be up early."

She bustled away. Flinders laughed easily and lit a cigarette.

"No harm, I suppose. And as you say, a third hand may come in useful. They may show fight, of course."

Pickett nodded. "Not may, but will. Those Nips are fighting devils. You've a rifle?"

"Naturally. I'd better stir up the blacks and have the skiff put in the water; it's pretty well hidden among the trees. There'll be an evening breeze—yes, we can make it over there very neatly before moonrise. They must have known that there's a base here at Nares Harbor."

Flinders took himself off, and Don Pickett chuckled to himself. Despite his blazing nerves, he had handled it all first-chop; Flinders was in a regular buck fever now, at thought of those Japs. But the plane—the plane! To Pickett, this was the thing supreme. Here was escape, flight from this lonely island, return to his world and work. And no risk about it either. Once at the controls, he had a straight flight southeast to Guadalcanal or wherever he might get ordered. No telling where the carrier was now.

Suspense held him. At dinner, both Flinders and his sister turned up in dark garments; white would be too revealing at night. He could guess at

the woman's bated breath and taut nerves; here was escape for her, too. She kept a tight rein on herself, however. The sun went down while they were still at table.

"I'd say, head for Browne," said Flinders. "That's the center islet. We can land there and be in between the two Japs and the trading-station. Suit you, Pickett?"

The American nodded. Flinders went to get his rifle. Pickett met the triumphant, eager flash in the eyes of Sally Flinders.

"Steady," he said quietly. "We're pulling it off; but don't talk. A word might change his mind."

She said nothing.

IN the brief tropic twilight, they took the path for the cove, and came out at the mouth of the stream. The skiff was a hundred yards down the shore; the stars came out in twinkling pin-points, a light breeze was ruffling over the water, all was well. Narraga and three other blacks stood by the skiff, jabbering while Flinders stepped the mast. He laughed.

"They don't like it a bit," he translated. "Narraga says we may not return as quickly as we think. Hop in, Sally; take the tiller. You next, Pickett. They'll shove us out."

So they did. The oars, lashed under the thwarts, remained untouched. The sail caught the breeze and without a ripple the skiff began to glide across the darkling water.

They were, Pickett judged, halfway to the islands when Flinders grunted and touched his foot, pointing. A flicker of flame, tiny and distant, arose from the north tip of Okoru; the two Japs were still there, where they had landed, at a campfire.

"Fine!" said Flinders, under his breath. "They've not started to explode yet. We've got 'em!"

No need of caution; the deep reverberation of surf from the outer reefs was constant. The starlight was glowing. Phosphorescence filled the water; every reef was outlined in luminous mist. It was low water, and as they came in under the shore of Browne Islet, Flinders cautioned his sister regarding shoals. Barely in time, too; already a golden radiance was visible in the eastern sky.

The sail came down; the prow scraped the sand. Flinders stepped over and drew up the skiff, unstepping the mast.

"Better pull her up clear out of sight," he said. "High tide will wash away the marks. I don't like to take any chances."

"And," added his sister, "look out for the pandanus scrub! Those leaves have saw edges; worse than knives if they get into you."

She lent a hand. Once out of the water, the skiff was lifted and Flinders

led the way in among the greenery. It was low, swampy mangrove-root heaven. A moment later the boat was laid well out of sight, and they came back to the sandy beach.

"I put sandwiches in the boat's locker," said Sally Flinders, "and a thermos of tea."

"We'll celebrate later," said Pickett grimly. "Well, Flinders, it's your say. I'm quite able to handle it alone, unless you want to come along—"

"You couldn't keep me back!" Flinders laughed softly, happily. "Sally, suppose you go over to the station and wait there for us."

"Take my flashlight," put in Pickett. "If— Hold on! Listen!"

They stood motionless. Water sucked among the mangrove roots; the reiterant surf-thunders came from afar, the island shaking under their feet to the concussions. The moon was beginning to show on the eastern horizon.

"Thought I heard engines," murmured Pickett, startled. "And I still do."

A queer sound like a stifled groan escaped Flinders.

"Look!" came his voice, choked and feeble. "Look! The reef-channel—south of the tip of Aawa—"

ALL three of them stood as though frozen; Pickett felt a prickling chill up his spine. The moon, lifting every instant into fuller glory, swept everything alive now. Between the moon and a spray of phosphorescence, the water to the south of the twin islet on which they stood was all alight.

And nosing steadily in for the harbor shelter, driving along high out of the water, was a submarine, all dark. A big one, thought Pickett; looked like a five-hundred-tonner.

"Well, we're in for it," he said, trying to control his voice. Disappointment engulfed him. "That's one of your Jap subs, sure enough."

Flinders swore heartily. His sister spoke up with calm acceptance.

"It's quite all right. We know this island intimately; we lived here. Andrew! Remember that little high spot of bare sand in among the trees, where I wanted to build a bamboo tea-house when I first came out? It'll be perfectly safe in there."

"Right you are, old girl." Flinders, too, was unruffled. "We'll have to lie doggo, Pickett; make up our minds to it. They'll land tonight or in the morning and get to work. They'll be too busy to cause us any worry. I'll get the thermos and sandwiches now—good thing we put the boat clean out of sight!"

He drifted off. His sister came to Pickett, with a low-breathed word.

"I know how you must feel—that plane and all. I'm sorry."

"Oh, fortunes of war!" said Pickett, affecting a lightness he did not feel. "Listen! They've seen the sub too."

From the camp of the two airmen a wild storm of yells was going up. It was answered from the sub, which had now swung around, broadside to the beach, and so close that Pickett shivered.

"Get out of here, quick!" he exclaimed. "Flinders!"

"Aye. Coming."

"Step on it! Searchlight."

So, winding in among the trees, they were presently ensconced in a sandy niche, while a spluttering searchlight swept the beach and picked up the airmen on Okoru islet. Which did not prevent Pickett from scouting what was going on.

This, to his dismay, was plenty. The house and godowns and sheds where the trading-station had been, were presently ringing with voices and ablaze with lights. Drums of fuel oil were broken out. A barge was brought from some concealment. The sub was refueling. At the same time, a boat went off to Okoru islet and the two aviators there were brought back; no sign, however, of their plane, which looked queer to Pickett. Japs were everywhere; their shrill babbling voices poisoned the moonlight.

Time passed; it became evident that this sub was not remaining to charge her batteries, but was in a hurry. A searchlight lit up the distant shore of Manus Island; boats were sent over there with water-casks. Fuel was taken aboard. And Pickett lay watching, groaning to himself from helplessness. Even the fifty-caliber machine-gun from his lost plane would have wrought havoc with that submarine; but he had nothing.

They wore out the night in hiding. What puzzled the American was why those aviators had gone aboard the sub, and why there was no attempt to refuel, or even to visit, their plane. The answer struck him with a wrench; perhaps they had wrecked the plane coming down!

He was astonished at the quantities of stores of all kinds laid up here, as the glare of light revealed them to him; this must be a main base for refueling both subs and aircraft. Back among the trees with the other two, he lay fuming out the hours. At last, toward dawn, the lights died away. The searchlight was killed. Flinders stole out for a look and came back with word that the sub was leaving.

GRAY light in the east was paling the stars. Pickett could contain himself no longer. No one had been left here; the sub was off for the reef passage.

"I'm going to take a look at that other island, where the plane came down," he said. "Flinders, come along



"Set it afire," Flinders said. "Burn up this blasted ju-ju." And so they did.

and show me the way, like a good chap, then wait for me here."

Sally Flinders stirred. "We'll both go," she said. "I'm stiff and cramped—oh! Yes, it'll do us good to stir around. Do you think their plane was left here?"

"Sure. The question is, why?"

They made the seaward shore of the island and stumbled along in the grayness until Flinders stopped them with a word. They had reached the end. The obscure mass of Okoru lifted ahead, a scant quarter-mile away. Pickett stripped to his trunks, while Flinders gave him a course that would avoid the coral and fetch the other islet. Then, with a brief word, he was off and at it.

The chill water put new life in him and washed away the bitter memories of that long night. The obscurity cleared by degrees, the sandy extremity of Okoru lifted to greet him; he came splashing ashore and started up the seaward beach of the islet, which was high with trees. He swung around into a cove—and there was what he sought. He halted, staring.

A broad, sandy beach was here; the Japs had been making for it, obvious-

ly, at flood tide. And they had come a cropper on a submerged reef, barely awash, fifty feet from the beach. There was the plane with her nose and wings high and dry, a Nakajimi fighter, the old type of Jap navy plane.

Pickett broke into a run, plunged into the water and splashed across to the reef. Even with the tide flooding in, the water was not deep; at low tide it would scarcely be any barrier. But when he reached the coral and gingerly picked his way to the plane, he saw why she had been abandoned.

One pontoon had been torn off and floated, half-submerged, beside the plane. A jagged point of coral had struck into the fuselage as she came down on one side; the whole after part of the cockpit was ripped and torn, and

her tail, under water, was a mess. Pickett's heart sank; then he reconsidered, studying the damage with critical eyes.

"Hm! At low tide she's wedged tight; at high tide, she could be got off. Fix up that pontoon, and she'd float. Get her over into the shallow water, patch up her hull, throw some gas into her—by thunder! I believe it could be done!" A blaze came into his eyes. "It means work like hell—but it can be done! If they've got any tools stored here at the island, and surely they must have, it can be done and I can do it!"

He studied the wreckage anew, carefully. These old Nakajimi planes had a tremendous lift; the front of the cockpit was undamaged, all was intact; once in the air she was good for anything—but how to get her in the air?

He returned thoughtfully the way he had come. Warm sunlight, clear sea and sky, hot tea from the thermos—the world felt better. . . .

"I can do something with that Nip plane," said Pickett, having given his report. "The thing I need you on, Flinders, is to get shears rigged to lift her. We can do that easily; these trees will provide spars. First, we'd better see what there is in the way of tools and supplies. Then the shears; then, using the skiff back and forth, we can do everything else, even to putting gas into her."

Flinders looked startled. "That's a job!"

"My job. I'm trained for it."

"What would you do even if you could make her fly?"

Pickett grinned. "Fly! Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home! That's me."

The trader laughed. "I'll think about it. Let's inspect the property first."

They did so, and it was a revelation. Beyond question, the Japs either had intended to form a regular base here, or meant to do so in future; the quantity of stores was enormous, comprehending everything from building supplies to tools and repair materials and foodstuffs. Drums of fuel oil and gasoline, all of American origin, were stacked like walls around the sheds and house. Two barges lay in the sand under lashed tarpaulins.

"Jap food isn't our food," commented Pickett. "Still, this canned stuff will keep us alive, and the spring has water enough for us. We can only work on the plane at low tide, for a bit, and get the shears ready. Shall we bring the skiff here and get to work?"

Flinders rubbed his chin. "I think I'd better make a trip home first."

"Can you get any of your boongs here to work?"

"The blacks? Lord, no!"

"Then don't go. Sally and I need the boat here, and at once."

Flinders stiffened. "What? Look here, Sally, this isn't your show!"

"But it is," she said quietly. "When the plane goes, I go."

"You? But you can't! I'll not have it!"

"Listen, Flinders," said Pickett. "She goes. I go. You go too if you like. But your blacks, your talking dead men, your spirits, your place over yonder—that's all out so far as we're concerned. We're here, and here we stay till that Nakajimi takes the air. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

FOR an instant the trader showed anger; then he melted. A trace of fear showed in his face. His blue eyes were irresolute, helpless, before the masterful domination of Pickett.

"I—I can't oppose it," he said. "But you don't understand. I must go back there, I must! Or else they'll come here."

"Who? The blacks?"

"Possibly. And Hansen, and the others—"

"Oh, boshi!" exploded Pickett. "Here, old chap, wipe that rot out of your mind! Pitch in and work; good hard physical labor will do wonders for you! If any of those sorcerers come around here, I'll conjure 'em with a bullet. What say? Are you with us?"

Flinders closed his eyes; a long breath escaped him. Then he looked at Pickett; he swallowed hard, and nodded.

"I'll do it. Take charge. But I warn you—there'll be trouble, awful trouble!"

"Okay. First the boat; we'll fetch it here and load up. Tools and rope and so on. Then up to the plane and get the shears rigged. Miss Flinders, we'll leave the commissary to you. You might fill some of these empty bottles with water, for use up yonder. Come along, Andy! Pack along this coil of line. I'll fetch some tools and be right with you."

Flinders departed. Pickett met the gaze of Sally Flinders, and nodded.

"We've nailed him. . . . It'll be all right."

"I hope so," she said. "You handled it wonderfully. In the sunlight everything's real; but now I'll be afraid of the nights. You don't understand at all; these people really have powers. Especially when he has made himself subject to them and believes—"

"Listen, sister!" broke in Pickett. "When night comes, he's going to be so all in from hard work that he won't know a spirit from a coral reef! Leave that to me! I can be tough if I must be, and I'm going to sweat this nonsense out of him!"

He was astonished at the way Flinders knuckled under and accepted his dictation; obviously the man's moral fiber had been sapped and undermined. He was well aware, however, that nothing can be so perilous as weakness, which is too often subject to an hysterical, almost maniacal fury. He intended to give Flinders no chance to think about talking dead men.

Thus began the task, which, except for the absolute necessity, presented insuperable difficulties. Sally Flinders handled the skiff back and forth, and took care of the meals. Pickett kept Flinders strictly on the job, in the little cove on Okoru; they buckled down to work there and stayed at it. He himself, hard as nails, labored furiously and shamed Flinders into like efforts. At night they camped in the sand. . . .

A day passed; two days. The Nakajimi had an old-style gun that fired through the propeller shaft, and a belt of ammunition; her gas-tank was dry as a bone; but she was built in water-tight compartments so she would float, and here came trouble. The ripped after compartments were filled with water; the center one was so badly cut up by the coral that with any lift it threatened to rip clear apart—the weight of water in the tail could not be got rid of at all. Consequently, even at high tide, Pickett could not get her off the reef. The light Japanese construction was against him.

He and Flinders worked at it under water by the hour, to no avail, and it was the trader who hit upon the idea.

"Back there I noticed some sacks of that stuff the natives use to mend their

canoes—a sort of stuff like sealing wax that they get from some tree or other. Melt that stuff and fill the center compartment with it, and it'd hold till hell freezes over!"

"Boy, you've got something!" exclaimed Pickett. "The weight won't amount to very much. Her bomb-rack is torn away, too. Yes, we can do that very thing! It'll give her a solid center section that'll hold. And while it's drying, we can be working on the tail."

So they brought over sacks of the pitchy stuff in the skiff, and fell to the lengthy job. The broken-off pontoon was already patched and back in place, thanks to stout baling-wire. The shears were rigged and ready. Pickett was resolved that the engine and forward portion of the Nakajimi should not take a plunge—that would involve further complications, and he wanted no engine trouble. So he was taking no chances.

ON this second night under the stars, Flinders pulled a blanket over his weary, aching body as soon as they finished supper, and was dead to the world in no time. Pickett sat with Sally Flinders over a cigarette before turning in.

"Andy's doing a man's work," he observed. "Tomorrow we'll really get going with the sealing and he'll get a notion of what work means under the equator! By the way, where's that rifle he fetched along?"

"I hid it," she replied quietly.

"Good girl! But he won't make any trouble now."

"You don't know what may happen."

"What on earth are you scared of? The blacks? Think they'll come over here? Even if they do, they won't be hostile."

She drew a deep breath. "Don't be too sure. They'll hate you for wanting to get me away, or Andrew."

"I don't savvy it. You mean they want to keep you here?"

"Both of us, yes. Andrew, because he has been through the initiation of their horrible ceremonies; he knows their secrets. Me—well, they want to use me in some way; I don't know just what. From their viewpoint it's a great honor. Something to do with their spirit ceremonies and devil worship. That's why I've been frightened."

"Good gosh!" exclaimed Pickett. "So that's it! That's what Andy gets for meddling, eh? But they won't know that we are aiming to leave."

"They'll know. They know now; they know all we've said."

"Oh, come! You're too sensible to swallow this spirit talk."

"You must believe me, you must! I tell you their powers are real—devilish powers!"

"Okay," he assented, not from agreement but to satisfy her. "Then we'd better keep some sort of watch. That little point on the north end of the island where the two Japs were camped—that'd be a good spot. One can watch the harbor and the shores from there."

"I know. I kept watch there last night from midnight till dawn," she confessed. "That's where I hid the rifle, too."

"I'll split it with you," he said promptly. "You get over there now. Wake me up around midnight and I'll watch till dawn, then come back and grab off an hour's shut-eye."

He insisted, and her protests died. He walked up to the sandy point with her, saw her comfortably ensconced with the rifle handy; then he came back and fell asleep.

FROM midnight to dawn he stood relief, the moon high and white, nothing stirring the waters of the harbor, ghostly phosphorescent radiance edging the reefs. The final hour of sleep put him in good shape to face the day's work.

It was work, no mistake about that. Mixing pitch under the equatorial sun was killing labor; it had to be carried out to the reef and poured into the apparently bottomless maw of the compartment. They knocked off at noon for a couple of hours, went back at it, and by sunset had the compartment full. Flinders was staggering, and Pickett was not much better off. But the worst of the job was done; the rest was ebb-tide work.

Supper over, Flinders was dead to the world in two minutes. At a gesture from Sally, Pickett joined her and walked down to the water's edge with her.

"A boat came over this afternoon," she said quietly. "I didn't want to say anything before him."

"The blacks?"

"Yes. Narraga and another man. Not here; to the station." And she nodded toward the twin islets to the south. "They remained for an hour or so, then the boat went back. You see? I told you they'd know all about it."

"Hm!" Pickett grunted. "And you think they were looking for us?"

"No." She seemed quite positive. "They knew we weren't there. They came over to make ju-ju; their diabolic sorcery. To kill the moon."

"That's funny." Pickett had already noted that hazy clouds were up the eastern sky, with the sunset red and angry. "Red sky at night, sailors' delight—a good omen."

She sighed a little. "You don't understand. They brought some sort of image and left it hidden where it'd not be found. Then, tonight, they make use of it—a sort of remote con-

trol, I believe. Look out for trouble of some kind tonight; I don't know what. They may try to wreck your plane."

"Oh! By remote control?" Pickett asked dryly.

She made a helpless gesture. "I'm telling you what I can. If the moon shows at all, it'll be later coming up. I don't know what to advise, honestly. I'm frightened."

"I'm not. Let's change the program tonight. Give me two hours of sleep, then take it hour and hour. Easier to keep alert during short watches. Suit you?"

"Oh, yes! Whatever you say. But don't be amused. You'll find that there'll be no moon until midnight at least. After that will come the time to look out. What is planned in the darkness, goes into effect by moonlight. I don't pretend to savvy it, but such is the way it works."

"Thanks, old girl; you're a brick, and I'm not amused a particle. I'm serious as hell, and I'll be ready for anything. Do you think they'll come over and rush us?"

"I doubt it; not at first, anyway. They may try it on as a last resort."

"Well, we've got two more days of it at least. That pitch is quick-drying stuff and I figure on lifting the Nakajimi off the coral tomorrow afternoon and mooring her in close. Might have her fixed up by next day. We'll have to start bringing over gas tomorrow; petrol, you know. That'll be a job, too. Two of us can't handle fifty-gallon drums in that skiff."

"How can you do it?"

"Dump out half a drum and bring the rest. Use five-gallon cans for filling the tank. Well, rest easy! Two hours, mind."

A little fudging here, bless her! When she shook him awake, the illuminated hands of his wrist-watch told him it was ten o'clock.

"All quiet, but no moon," she said softly. Flinders was snoring away.

"Okay. Get some sleep now and I'll wake you on the hour."

He could not resist the temptation to let her sleep an extra hour, however. Everything was silent, except for the surf-poundings and a distant angry bark of flying foxes over on Manus Island. Thick clouds veiled all the eastern sky; but any boat paddling over would have been revealed by phosphorescent flashes in these still waters.

"To kill the moon, eh?" thought Pickett. "Well, the boongs sure did it, if that was their intent! Curious thing, too; it's only the eastern sky that's clouded. By midnight or a little after, the moon will be out. Hell's bells! Why, anyone would think I was beginning to take some stock in this nonsense talk! Maybe I am, at that."

At midnight the moon was reaching the cloud-edges and beginning to show fitfully. He waited for a view of the harbor, found all clear, then went back to camp and roused Sally Flinders. She saw the hour and ventured protest.

"I cheated because you did; don't do it again," he said, chuckling. "All clear. On the hour, remember!"

She disappeared. Pickett rolled up near Flinders, and was asleep in no time.

How long he slept, he did not know. He wakened very abruptly, came wide awake all in an instant. The moon was high and white, in full brilliance. Then he heard a voice, and recognized the thin, strident voice of Narraga.

"Debbil boat!" it said. "Debbil boat! Cut it!"

Pickett blinked around, hand stealing to holstered gun. Narraga was not here, but Flinders stood a dozen feet away, in full moonlight, his features distorted horribly.

"That fella no good. Suppose me go close up, kill 'em along ax!" he was saying, but his voice was that of Narraga the sorcerer.

Pickett sat bolt upright.

- He saw Flinders pick up the ax they had been using, whirl it in his hand, and start for the beach. "Debbil boat!" The meaning of it penetrated his brain.

"Flinders! Come back here, you fool!" he cried out. But Flinders paid no heed; he was no longer Andy Flinders but a thing bubbling black-talk.

Pickett leaped to his feet. He started after the other at a run, a yell on his lips. Flinders swung around and whirled the ax again, this time ready to strike.

"More better you go 'sleep!" he cried savagely. A maniacal fury was in his face; his teeth were bared, his eyes bulged. "Me kill 'em along ax!"

PICKETT, in the act of hurling himself on the man, dodged frantically as the ax cut. That blow meant business. Pickett tripped over a coil of light rope, went rolling, and came up to see Flinders dashing for the water and the reef, stark naked.

He hesitated. His hand dropped to the pistol, and paused. No, not that, if only for Sally's sake! Whatever this devilry might mean, he could not shoot Flinders down except in extremes. He caught up the coil of rope and dashed after the man, who was now in the shallow water. The tide was at ebb; the water inside the reef was no more than waist-deep.

Straight for the reef headed Flinders, for the reef where the Nakajimi perched like some grotesque ghostly thing in the moonlight. He was swinging the ax as he splashed; he meant to attack the plane and destroy it. Pickett gained on him, uncoiling

the rope as he splashed along through the water, making ready a bight to throw—a desperate intent. He called again, sharply and frantically, but Flinders paid no further heed to him.

The phosphorescent water foamed in furious luminescence. Pickett was not a dozen feet behind now, but Flinders had already gained the coral. It cut his bare feet and he leaped high, swinging the ax, with a cry of pain. Then he was up on the knob in front of the plane, poising himself for a swinging blow at the propeller and nose well above him.

Pickett launched the bight of the rope. It uncoiled and fell across the bare shoulders of the man. Flinders whipped around, yelling, fighting at the rope with the ax in a frenzy. Perhaps he thought it was a sea-snake. The rope slid back. Pickett coiled it again, in haste, while the stark figure stood there shaking the ax in the moonlight, shrilling insensate cries in the voice of Narraga.

The thought of coming to grips with that ax was distinctly unpleasant.

Pickett drew a step nearer—another step. Flinders turned and balanced himself anew to lash out at the towering nose of the plane. Pickett whirled the rope and cast, in blind hope of knocking the man off balance. Instead, the loose coil settled over the head of Flinders. A shrill scream burst from him. He let the ax fall and gripped at the rope with both hands—and with wild delight, Pickett jerked hard.

FLINDERS staggered. For the first time, he seemed to become aware of the American there below him, waist-deep in the water. A demoniac voice of fury escaped him, as he lost balance; with a convulsive effort he leaped up and outward, straight at Pickett.

The two came down together in the water, with a wild flurry.

That settled it, thought Pickett—and changed his mind two seconds later. The white shape in his grip upreared and fought with whiplash ferocity, with the mad abandon of a wild animal. Waist-deep in water, the two stood battling back and forth until Flinders got his hands about the American's throat; then he really went to work.

They went under. To Pickett, it was as though an octopus had him in its tentacles. His blows had no effect. Flinders was all over him in squirming naked savagery, and those terrible fingers were bands of iron sinking into his throat. The frightful consciousness that he was done for sank into his brain; then, with a desperate effort, he was up and on his feet momentarily, dragging Flinders up with him.

The report of a rifle reached him. Then another shot. He thought of Sally, watching on the sandspit. A frantic convulsion seized him; his lungs were afire, the moonlight was going black. He hammered the clinging shape furiously. They staggered back to the edge of the reef, farther out of water—and suddenly, seizing a chance that he felt rather than saw, Pickett fell forward on the other man, bearing him back by bodily weight.

Flinders went down under him, down with naked body against the coral. The sharp spikes ripped his flesh; a scream of agony escaped him. Pickett smashed his head against the coral, smashed it again. The deadly grip loosened; the man went limp and lifeless.

Standing erect, gasping air into his lungs, Pickett clawed and massaged his throat, until his strangled senses returned and his brain cleared. He stooped and examined the battered Flinders, found him alive but senseless, got an end of the rope, and securely trussed the naked shape hand and foot. Then, dragging Flinders behind him, he made for the beach. Sharp fear for Sally drove him on.

Pausing only to drop his prisoner and fling a blanket over him, he set out at a soggy run for the sandspit, around the tip of the islet. He called out, and she rose to answer him; in a surge of relief, he saw all was well and slowed.



Blacks were all around him, striking, grappling, yammering excitedly. He fought, as a man fights fog. The rifle was wrenched away; he went rolling, blacks on top of him.

"What is it?" he gasped. "The—the shots!"

She pointed to something afar in the moonlight, down the shore.

"One of their canoes, full of men! They were heading here. I shot twice, over them. They turned and scooted."

He could see the huge, topheavy, triangular native sail now, going away fast. He dropped in the warm sand and laughter seized him. He sat laughing helplessly until she shook him and stormed at him in alarm.

"Come out of it! Why, you're soaking wet—what is it, what is it? Don't laugh like that! What's happened? Here, take a cigarette—for God's sake calm down!"

Pickett got himself in hand. "Lord! I didn't know a man could have a touch of hysteria. That must have been it, sure enough—thanks." He puffed the cigarette alight. His nerves were under control again, and he told her all that had happened. The triangular sail was drifting far over toward Manus Island.

"I warned you!" she breathed, her face ghastly in the moonlight as she listened, staring. "I told you—"

"Look here, what does it mean? He wasn't pretending! Why, I could swear that he actually *was* Narraga, even to the voice!"

"Of course he was," she replied. "They can do things like that, incredible, evil things! If you believed in them and had shared their ceremonies and were one of them—they could do it with you, too. Your will and resistance would be weakened. Don't you see? Andrew wasn't himself at all, he won't know a thing about it; his body was occupied by the spirit of Narraga, who was set on destroying the plane."

Pickett reflected on this for a moment. "Be damned to it if I'll swallow any such nonsense!" he said angrily. "Maybe it's so, but I won't have any of it in mine, thanks. Well, I guess there won't be any more activity tonight; let's go back and get some solid sleep. I'm stiff and sore. We'll leave Andy just as he is, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind anything," she answered lifelessly.

FLINDERS did not wake up until Pickett, after a spot of breakfast, began to untie the binding rope. His eyes opened and he stared up at Pickett; he was looking all washed up.

"Hello! What's all this?" he said. "Where are my clothes?"

"Here. You went off your nut last night. Feel like smashing up the plane, do you?"

"Heavens, no! Why on earth would I do that?"

"Why would you talk like a boong? You gave me a tussle."

Pickett said no more; the blue eyes held a piteous comprehension and ter-

ror. Flinders understood, so the less said, the better. He was in no shape for work, either; his body and feet were lacerated by coral, and the back of his head was in bad shape. Sally went to work on him with a first-aid kit, and Pickett got about his own business.

The Nakajimi's tail and ailerons and rudder took no end of work. By great good luck, Pickett had fetched his rubber doughnut, deflated, in the skiff; now he put it to work. In its pocket was its patching kit, and ruthlessly cutting up the yellow painted doughnut, he had the Nakajimi looking as though broken out with jaundice. But the patches held.

With the afternoon's flood tide, there was no more he could do now, so all three of them went in the skiff to the trading-station on the twin islets. Sea and sky remained lonely and empty. Pickett and Sally fell to work with gasoline drums and five-gallon tins. Flinders disappeared. After a time he came out of the brush, carrying something. He brought it over to them and set it down.

It was a hideous little carved human figure, two feet high, decorated with feathers and shells and stones.

"Pour some petrol over it and set it afire," he said. "I'm damned sorry about last night, Pickett; sha'n't occur again if I can help it. Burn up this blasted ju-ju."

So they did. It was the only comment Flinders made on what had happened.

Pickett got three gasoline drums half emptied, deliberately pouring out the fluid about the sheds and house and then rolling the drums to the skiff. To get the Nakajimi's tank even comfortably filled would mean another day's work; meantime, the plane had to be got off the coral. They went at this job in the shank of the afternoon.

The shears were already rigged. It was a makeshift affair but it worked. The Nakajimi lifted; the native pitch held her together. The repaired pontoon stayed put. She scraped over the coral, at the very limit of lift; she came clear, and pulled over into the shallow water and was beached high enough for her ripped after compartments to vomit water and small fish. Pickett regarded her fondly.

"Think she'll fly?" asked Flinders, later, as they ate supper in the sunset.

"She's got to," said Pickett. "She can take off from this very water, swing around the jag of reef, and go. Whether she'll hold together is the question. If—"

"Listen!" cried Sally sharply.

They heard them; they saw them, far flashes like stars in the sunset sky: A flight of Zeros bound southwest from some base up at the tip of New Guinea. Pickett squinted up.

"We'll be seeing you soon!" he said grimly. "And we've got a gun that'll work, too, if you get too curious."

They did not; they were high and going far.

"Show me," said Sally.

They climbed up into the cockpit and he showed her how the gun worked: she even fired a burst into the trees, and they got back to the sand laughing. Flinders, looking sadly from his bandages, asked a question.

"When do you plan to get away?"

"We must fix up the tail and get in the gas; that'll take all tomorrow. Can't leave till the morning after, by choice. Of course, if any emergency shows, like a Jap sub coming in, we'll have to go in a hurry and chance it. No night flying if I can help it, though."

"YOU shouldn't have told him that," said Sally, later, as Pickett was walking over with her to the sandspit. They were taking the hour-and-hour watches this night.

"Why not? He's himself."

"Yes, consciously. But don't you see, can't you understand," she almost wailed, "that subconsciously he's in the power of those awful blacks? They can just pick his brain—"

"Listen, sister; I don't savvy it and I don't give a tinker's damn about it," broke in Pickett. "Forget all that stuff and keep watch. Whichever one of us sleeps by him, will have a cord from the corner of his blanket to a thumb; we'll wake up if he moves. If those boongs should happen over, we'll blow 'em out of the brush. All I'm worried about now is a Jap sub coming in to refuel, so concentrate on that and the hell with anything else!"

"The blacks won't worry us. They'll know, now, that we're not leaving tomorrow," she said. Pickett left her with a disgusted grunt.

The night passed with no alarm. The moon was high and beautiful, coming up later each night, the sea was empty and beautiful, the dawn came with a rosy flush of promise.

Pickett got to work with a song in his heart, and the work went well. At the mid-morning flood tide, the Nakajimi was floated; the pontoons leaked a bit but she hung together well. And now came the tank-filling operation, which was slow, laborious and difficult in the extreme.

Almost to the last, Pickett cherished the hope of touching off that oil and gas and destroying the huge stock of stores; he had to abandon the hope in the light of cold reason. That pillar of fire or smoke would be seen by any Jap plane within a hundred-mile radius or farther. It would be a dead giveaway, and he was intent right now on saving his own neck. There would be troubles enough later; he would have to run the gantlet of all the Jap



*"Pickett!" came a desperate, choked word. The knife was sawing at his wrists.
"Sally—in the—plane—"*

forces between here and Guadalcanal. He simply dared not risk it.

So came afternoon again and the declining sun. Pickett, next to dead on his feet, tried the engine and as he revved it the long blasting explosions roared back reassurance. The sun was at the horizon when he staggered up the beach and joined the others at supper.

"Ought to have champagne," he said. "Too bad the Nips didn't leave us some! We're all set. Get off an hour before sunup. Andy, are you going with us?"

"Surest thing you know," assented Flinders promptly.

"Good man! Three can crowd in somehow."

He viewed his job with weary satisfaction—indeed, with exultation. The Nakajimi was moored just below flood-tide mark. With low tide, she would rest steadily on her pontoons on the sand, and the leaking water would follow the tide out of the pontoons. With high tide, before dawn, more water would be in them, but not enough to interfere with her takeoff. She was well moored, too, nose facing the shore, which would keep her weak tail in the water as long as possible.

Yes, a hard job, a good job well done! He sighed contentedly and in the last daylight retrieved his cleaned and dried pistol and cartridges and put them together as should be. In high good-humor, he clapped Flinders on the knee and grinned.

"No tricks now, tonight!" he said heartily. "Another few hours and it'll just be a bad dream."

Flinders smiled wanly, and Pickett noticed suddenly how old and broken he looked, how his cheeks sagged and how haunted were his eyes. Gad!

The poor devil was paying a price for his spirit stuff and no mistake!

"I'll do my best," he replied quietly. "Tie me up, if you like."

"Nonsense! You're out of the woods now and one of us," said Pickett, with more confidence than he felt. He really was sorry for the man. But he meant to keep on with the blanket-and-cord precaution, however, and did so.

SALLY spoke once of her brother. It was when Pickett relieved her on watch, just before midnight, and they sat watching Nares Harbor in the moonlight, over a smoke.

"Nothing so answers for his sincerity as his finding and burning that ju-ju image."

"How so?" Pickett questioned.

"As I understand it, that image stood for him; through it, Narraga reached his mind and mastered him with some hypnotic suggestion. If anything happened to the image, the same thing would happen to him."

"Eyewash," sniffed Pickett.

"Maybe; it's not nice to think about. And have you noticed how he has changed? He looks twenty years older. He's really trying. I think, to throw off all this ju-ju stuff."

"Sure, and is doing it. He'll come around in great style, once we're away from here, among his own people again."

Pickett sent her away reassured and hopeful. He was not losing any sleep over Flinders himself; he had other things on his mind. Midnight came and passed uneventfully, the silvery waters clear. Even now he feared lest some Jap sub come running in across that glittering water; none came.

When he awakened for the last time, Flinders was snoring away, the cord

to his thumb had not been disturbed; but there was a hazy mist across the moon. He relieved Sally; the same mist lay across the harbor, veiling the twin islets to the south. Mist was not unusual, she said; she was in high spirits, as danger lessened.

"Well, get your last hour's sleep, then I'll come along and we'll go," said Pickett, the rifle across his knees. She went, with a laugh.

He sat watching the ghostly mist, illuminated by the moonlight, writhing among the trees of the island and over the water. He thought over what she had said about that hypnotic sorcery, and sniffed again; that sort of thing lay far from his scheme of things. Still, he admitted to himself, it might somehow explain Flinders, whose mind was certainly open to these diabolical suggestions.

He yawned, looked at the radium hands of his watch, and rose stiffly. Time was up, and nothing had happened; it was all over, and now there was the flight to be faced. The Nakajimi with its Jap markings ought to get safely past the enemy outposts—the rub would come when he tried to make contact with any U. S. force, since the plane had a receiving radio but no sending set.

Thinking about this, he started back to camp.

The mist was thicker now; he was surprised how it cloaked everything from sight, even shimmering with moonlight as it was. He was feeling his way back along the shore, when he fancied something moving past him. The shape vanished. Another came; then something solid bounced into him, and arms gripped him.

His nostrils caught the rancid-oil smell of blacks in the same instant.

The mist—a boat paddled over from Manus Island—this flashed through his mind. Something had gripped the rifle in his hand. Blacks were all around him, striking, grappling, yammering excitedly in a shrill wave of voices.

He fought, as a man fights fog. The rifle was wrenched away; everything happened in a split-second flash. He went rolling on the sand and felt a breath of keen, rushing sea-wind. Blacks were on top of him, crushing him down. He lay quiet now, his fingers desperately fumbling with his holster-catch. A shrill, terrifying cry went through him like a knife—a woman screaming. Then it stopped.

The pistol came clear in his hand. He slipped off the catch, shoved it into the bodies on top of him, and began to fire.

That freed him, quick enough. He wriggled clear of dead weight and was just coming erect when a huge, grotesquely-haired shape slammed headlong into him and knocked him prostrate. Something struck him over the ear, and he went out in a shower of stars.

He lay on the sand, tied hand and foot, helpless.

ONLY a few moments could have elapsed. He was back at the camp-site; the sea-wind was up, the mist was blowing thin, moonlight was streaming down. The Nakajimi was bobbing, slowly and majestically, on the high tide—the flood on which he had meant to take off.

Blacks were capering around, a dozen or more of them. Several of them, at one side, were clustered about Flinders; they had stripped him to the skin and were holding him, Narraga talking furiously at him and shaking a spear. Sally? The thought leaped in Pickett's brain and he lifted his head. It hurt. He looked around.

No sign of her anywhere—yet he had heard her scream. Probably a spear had done for her. She was not in sight. The ferocity of the blacks around Flinders was obvious. Pickett lay staring, horror overwhelming him—to think of it, at the very last minute! Horror etched those naked black shapes about Flinders, with their grotesque fuzzy headgear.

Suddenly the group broke into motion. Flinders tore free from the holding grip, a shout escaped him, and his fist took Narraga in the face and knocked him sprawling. Next instant a spear transfixed his body—then another, and another. He tore a knife from the nearest black, but had no chance to use it. He crumpled up and the moonlight etched black blood on his white skin.

With one piercing yell, Narraga leaped forth and began to harangue the group of blacks. He danced about,

shaking his spear at the Nakajimi, howling frenzied words at them; and they howled back. He was working them up to a pitch of fury, to attack and destroy the plane.

Pickett lay helpless. Helpless, despairing, a groan burst from him. Everything was lost now—Flinders dead, Sally, heaven knew where, himself pinioned, the plane ripped and destroyed. Narraga howled still more shrilly, the others echoed his diabolic cries—then Pickett jumped in every nerve. He heard a sound beside him, he felt a touch.

Here was Flinders crawling to him, lifting up to gaze at him with horrible dying eyes, clutching at him and out-reaching with the knife, which he still clutched. Pickett closed his eyes. He could hear the man's bubbling breath and gasps. Well, what did it matter now? Better to die by the hand of Flinders than by savage spears and clubs—

"Pickett!" came a single desperate choked word. The knife touched him, was sawing at his wrists, at the tough trailing vine binding them. "Sally—in the plane—"

That was all. Flinders groaned and fell forward and lay quiet. But Pickett felt the bonds loosen; he wrenched, and his arms came free. Catching up the fallen knife, he slashed at his ankle-bonds. The knife sheared through them.

But, at the same instant, Narraga concluded his harangue with one maniacal screech, then turned and leaped for the beach and the plane riding the wavelets. The others yelled and

bounded after him, springing high in the air like animals. Pickett was still astonished by his own freedom, at the last action of the dying Flinders. Suddenly the words reached into his brain. Sally—in the plane—

He saw her then, briefly, saw her clear and distinct in the moonlight, just her head—and it was lost in a burst of fire jetting from the nose of the plane. She had the machine-gun going. Its voice lifted in a furious staccato chatter. Its belt was set with tracer bullets; they seared the moonlight like white-hot wires. She could aim only as the Nakajimi pointed; but two or three of the blacks were directly in the line of fire. They died. The others scattered with frantic shrieks of terror—scattered, splashed away, right and left, were gone like shadows.

Pickett's whole instinct was to get out there in a rush, cast off the mooring lines and clamber aboard. He forced himself to check the instinct. First, he leaned above Flinders, but only briefly. He could do nothing. Flinders was dead.

Now, indeed, he broke into a spurt. He heard one wild, ringing cry of recognition and relief from Sally Flinders; but when he had cast loose and scrambled up to the cockpit, he saw her lying on the floor. She had fainted. He pulled her limp form out of the way and left her alone.

THE chattering roar of the engine rose and died and rose again, then swept up in a slow and stupendous crescendo that filled earth and sky. The Nakajimi turned. As she swung, Pickett vengefully sent a burst of bullets sweeping through the trees. The engine-voice rose in a shattering precipitation of sound. He switched on the lights to see the instruments, and watched carefully as the plane taxied out around that jagged bit of reef.

She skipped lightly across the silver waters, away from the dawn and into the wind; he touched the stick, and she lifted with that full-throated roar that bespeaks a perfectly functioning motor. The water fell away. She circled; the eastern sky was all gray. Beneath lay Nares Harbor, that huge haven in the sea itself. It dropped away, and the spiky peaks of Manus Island dropped. Pickett leaned back in his seat, relaxing.

He glanced at the figure of Sally, on the floor, then looked up.

"Thanks, old chap, thanks!" he said. "Sorry you're not with us—or are you? She's all right. We'll pull through—thanks again to you!" He glanced at the lighted compass. "Guadalcanal, bearing southeast—aye, Cap'n Flinders! Keep a sharp lookout aloft!"

And he smiled, as the Nakajimi hurtled into her course.

What Do You Think?

These are anxious days for all of us. We are united solidly in the war effort; yet otherwise we are a vastly diverse nation; and no two of us have just the same personal problems. When recently we published excerpts from James Mursell's "A Personal Philosophy for Wartime," it occurred to us that probably each reader could write at least one significant and helpful chapter for such a book—and no two would be just alike.

With this idea in mind, we would welcome letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or if you are in one of the armed Services, a letter which would interest your fellow-readers on your recent experiences or expectations for the future—these within the censorship regulations, of course.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do You Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Featherfoot



His manager got excited and complained that he'd become a mere shallow hell of his former lightning-swift self. But—he showed 'em.

by JOEL REEVE

JAMES "FEATHERFOOT" GRIDDLE stood on one foot; then he stood on the other. It was all too much like a movie. It was all too damn' silly. If Irene were not so beautiful, he would hit Bertram on the nose once, and walk out. He eyed Bertram's nose. It could do with a little bobbing, at that.

Old Oswald Verplanck ran to nose also. It was a family trait, inherited from the poltroons of early Manhattan, Bertram said—or was it "poltroons"? James would have to look

that up, too. He had to delve into a dictionary too often, these days. He was a very smart lightweight boxer, one of the best, but it made his head ache to read the dictionary.

Like Bitsy Batik, his manager, said: "Brains in that ring is one thing. Brains among Irene's fancy-ancy chuckleheaded friends is another. You're outa your class, pal. Irene is hotsy-totsy, but Bertram is a drip from a leaky faucet."

Old Oswald stared down at them. He was absent in the flesh—he had

been, since James met Irene—sojourning on West Coast Florida, in search of surcease from rheumatism and the pain elsewhere which the new taxes had brought upon him. But Brother Bertram Verplanck was *in loco parentis*, whatever that meant besides acting like a heel. He was now saying:

"I forbid you to see my sister, do you hear? She cannot be escorted in public by a prizefighter!"

James said patiently: "I am not a prizefighter, Bertie. I am a boxer, as you well know, having watched

every fight I have had since I blew that bum duke—I mean lost to Lou Fagin. And I will fight Fagin again."

Bertram was wearing his Navy uniform—he was a Lieutenant (j.g.)—and stood very stiff and forbidding. His big beak jutted farther than his determined chin. He said: "James! That is all! I am wiring Father tonight! I will *not* have you chasing Irene and making a laughingstock—"

"Just like a movie," muttered James.

Irene arose from the settee in the vast Verplanck drawing-room where the three had met quite by accident, and most unfortunately for James. She looked like seven million dollars. She looked like Champion Lou Fagin's right cross, the most beautiful punch in boxing. She took her pert nose from her mother's side of the family. She cried:

"Go and send your old wire, you pitiful bully! Leave us alone, do you hear? I'm sick of your interference in my business! Go away, you nasty old Bertie!" Irene's temper came from her father's side, James judged.

Bertram almost saluted them, so stiff and formal was he. "I have warned you! You may never marry my sister, James Griddle!"

He went out, striding with great strides.

"Would you mind if I referred to your brother as a jerk?" inquired James. "The jerk!"

HE resumed his seat on the small couch. Irene dropped into his arms, resting her head on his shoulder and turning her red lips to be kissed. She sighed: "I'm only afraid of Father. The old walrus has a bum heart. I love Father, James. You may think it's queer, but I couldn't go against him. We may have to wait for years!"

James stared uneasily at the oil portrait of Oswald Verplanck. He was the one who had restored the tottering Verplanck fortunes with his ruthless, canny maneuvering in Wall Street before the days of the New Deal. He was a tough old tomato, James knew—as tough as Lou Fagin. James said:

"Look, baby. The thing to do is elope. Then we can let *them* worry."

"I couldn't," she said. "I do love you, James! You're such a nice dope, and so ungrammatical and—and nice!"

"Then we elope!" said James emphatically.

"We do not," she said. "We have to think of something. I can't imagine what. But something. After all, you're not poor. You're an established man, with a good business."

She was not talking about the fight game. She was thinking of the James Griddle, Inc., machine-shop, where they made a fine little part of machine-guns for use in the war. James had been a journeyman toolmaker while he was beginning the business

"Fight!" snorted Oswald Verplanck. "Boxing! And not even a champion!"

of busting beaks for big bonuses. He had bought a shop with his first money. It was paying off, and he was doing his part in the war effort.

He said: "I am making this fight with Lou Fagin for Army and Navy relief. I am not getting one dime. Your father will not think that is smart."

"No!" sighed Irene. "Father is not whole-hearted in his admiration of the way we are not winning the war. Father is an old fathead. He suns himself and curses the world. But I love him."

James cried: "But what about me? I have got to fight Lou Fagin, who is not a pushover. I have got to be sharper than two tacks. How am I going to get sharp with this hanging over me?" He realized suddenly that he was getting as bad as the rest of them, and that it was not resembling even a good movie. He got up. He said sternly: "Nuts! I am going over to Jersey and train for Fagin."



He kissed her once more. He walked down the steps, very firmly. Then he dashed back and kissed her again, and for a moment they were frightened, two kids, clinging to one another, trying to shut out the world which threatened their happiness. . . .

The colored boy boldly stabbed James Griddle in the face. He walked in, crossing the right. James moved away, half-heartedly. The colored boy was fast, leaping to sink it deep in the ribs of his boss. Bitsy Batik hurriedly rang the bell to end the practice session.

Bitsy Batik was knee-high to a subway turnstile. He had a big voice, however. He boomed through the sound of the shower-bath which cascaded over James Griddle's grateful hot body, "Featherfoot, they call you! Lead dogs, it should be! Lou Fagin

will not murder you. Better it should end that way, sudden. If you cannot keep out of Lou Fagin's way, if you are not sharp, it will be mayhem! He should be arrested for what I am thinking he will do!"

James shuddered. He was expecting a call from Irene that evening. Bertram, that jerk, had wired Oswald Verplanck, as per promise. Tonight there should be an answer.

Irene was frightened. The very name of Oswald Verplanck had frightened big, grown men with a million-

Bertie had introduced James and Irene in a moment of admiration, after James had outpointed Okie Waldo, the Terror from Oklahoma. Bertie had said:

"This is the best boxer in the business. Clever. Featherfoot!"

Irene had sort of stopped in a quick double-take, scanning James' open Celtic features, his kid grin, his neat outlines and crinkly blue eyes. Then she had held his hand a moment longer than necessary and whispered: "Call me sometime, won't you, Featherfoot?"



dollar bank-roll. James was beginning to get frightened too.

He came out, listlessly drying himself. His love came up and choked him, and he scarcely listened to Bitsy. The little manager said: "Bertram Verplanck is out betting his shirt you will get beat. What has he got against you, that he should break the odds? A favor he would be doing us, if you would let me bet. But no! War Bonds! Patriotism! No profits. Everything is going to hell!"

James said: "Hand me my shirt. Bertie is a cluck. Everybody knows Bertie is not bright." Bertie was a fight fan, though. He was always buzzing around the camps, before he got into the Navy. He pretty well knew about things. James had to give him that much credit.

Well, James' heart did a flippety-flop, and he called her the next day, and every day thereafter; and finally he had broken her down to the point where Bertie could walk in on them and catch them wrapped up like an Eskimo in his parka. Love was around them like a halo. Even Bertie could see it.

So then they were in the cut. Bertie was a snob, for all his mixing around with fighters and night-club people. Bertie was a Verplanck—and so was his old man.

James went right out through Bitsy's plaintive barrage and to the cottage. He sat by the phone; Bitsy came in behind him and kept wailing: "With blue bloods you got to mix, yet! With plush furniture, and you a Mick from the Bronnix! Now

you don't eat right, you don't move around—you're a bootsy, instead of a featherfoot. Fagin will eat your heart. Fagin is a real bog-trotting Irisher. You are lace curtain, yet!"

The shrill tinkle of the bell shut Bitsy up. James reached out, hesitated, fear choking him. Then he set his jaw and said, "Hello," into the instrument.

"Oh, darling!" said Irene's tuneful voice. "It's the worst. The very worst! Father is coming home! The old plug-ugly is coming up and kick our lovely love all over the joint! Bertram, the rat, called him long distance, and Father is taking a plane."

James said, "Ugh!" as though Fagin had kicked him in the stomach.

"I'm dying!" said Irene. "But I will fight for you, James! I will take Father over the twenty-round route, and match him punch for punch! I love you, James, and haven't you got any ideas at all in your stupid head?"

"No," said James dully. "No. Uh —I—er—" He glared at Bitsy, then said defiantly: "I love you, too!"

THERE was more of that, while Bitsy chewed his nails. James hung up, and Bitsy said: "Lovey-dovey, bahl Smoochy-woochy! Maaaaa! I should live to handle a moovey-calf! Fagin will positively tear out your liver and feed it to the press row! And they'll eat it, too, the buzzards!"

James cudged his poor brain. He had given up the dictionary and was spending all his spare time trying to think up some way of making Oswald Verplanck love him. He was totally unsuccessful.

He boxed dutifully with the fine spermates which Bitsy provided for him. His forte was speed and skill. In the ring, as at his lathe, he was first of all a mechanic. He understood the fine art of boxing. He was a deft man with a jab, a lightning one-two artist, a stand-up joy to the waning ranks of the old-time lovers of the "fancy."

And now he was far from his form. The colored boy made him miserable daily—and the colored boy was a dim counterpart of Lou Fagin. He had been hired to simulate Lou's style against James—and he was doing it too well. He almost knocked James out a couple of times.

They went down to New York the day of the weighing-in, and Bitsy put a good face upon it to conceal his aching heart. Lou Fagin was good-natured, grinning, cool, facing the photographers. He was a dark Mick with all the ear and nose and eye-marks, too, of a fighter from the docks. He was rough and tough, and he had taken James before, when James was a year younger, and right at his peak.

Red Dye, a smart reporter, said: "I got to give it to you, James. Any-

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley



Bitsy roared: "If you get past the fifth, maybe you can last." James said nothing.

thing for the armed forces. You don't care how much you get beaten to make money for Uncle Sam, do you?"

"Don't answer that *schlemiel!*" howled Bitsy. "We'll absolutely murder this Fagin! We got robbed last time! We will anni—we will murder him!"

"Very funny! Ver-ree funny," said Dye. "And loud, too. But I saw James box this week." He held his nose and walked out.

At the hotel where they would spend that day and the next, with a light workout in between, which would be a desperate effort to get James into boxing form, Bitsy moaned:

"Now I am glad Bertie Verplanck ran up the odds! Now I am glad I do not bet, even for such prices! Even Dye knows what is with you! When newspaper men get smart, all is over, likewise ended! Love, you got! Love and boxing does not mix!"

The phone rang. An irascible voice rasped in James' ear: "This is Oswald Verplanck."

James stammered: "Y-yessir!"

"Want to see you. Come right out here," ordered the sawlike voice.

"No!" howled Bitsy. "That you cannot do! Right here you stay!"

James said: "Y-yessir. Right away."

He left Bitsy screaming to his gods, if any, and went down to get a cab. His mind whirled around, and he was

frightened half to death. Irene had been having it with the old guy, and Irene had lost. Now it was his turn, and he would go through with it, he said to himself grimly, if it killed him, which it probably would. He wondered if Oswald had a gun.

He mounted the steps of the Verplanck mansion with trembling knees. A severe manservant took his hat. He went into the echoing cavern which was the drawing-room; and there, under his own portrait, looking twice as mean, stood Oswald Verplanck.

Bertram, triumphant, was leaning one elbow on the mantel, like a picture in a fashion magazine, his hair marcelled, and James took time for a quick look at the nose on the scion of the Verplanck family. It was still attractive to a right fist. He looked back at the father of his love, and there was the same proboscis, only bigger. Yet he had no desire to punch Oswald's nose. He would as soon have tweaked a tiger by the tail.

Irene came forward and grasped his arm. She had a grip like a vise. James wished he was back in his shop, bending over a vise. . . . Then he gathered himself together and blurted: "Irene and I want to get married!"

Oswald Verplanck let out a roar. Bertram jumped. Irene wilted a little. "Featherfoot!" boomed Oswald. "James Featherfoot Griddle! Mrs. James Featherfoot Griddle! Blanket blinkety doublety woublety—" Or words to that effect. "No! No, I said!"

James sort of relaxed. He took a deep breath. He set Irene gently aside. He eyed Oswald Verplanck with a hard eye. He was still scared, but he was pushed into a corner. He said: "Now, wait a minute. I'm a fighter, sure. I'm fightin' the champ tomorrow night. But I'm a businessman too. I never turned down a proposition without lookin' all the way through it. I want—"

Oswald Verplanck grated: "I've looked into it. I've had experts look into you, Featherfoot. I know all about you. I don't want any part of you in my family! Now let that be settled! Irene!"

"I won't!" said the girl. "I'm sticking with him! He's my nice, goofy James!"

"Yahh!" howled Oswald. "'Nice! Goofy!' He's not worth a hill of beans! Little old factory! Livin' on a Government contract! Prob'ly makin' misfit parts for stupid Army brass hats! Featherfoot!"

HIS voice reached a falsetto crescendo. He stopped; his mottled old face went white, and he clutched at his left side. Bertram went forward. Irene deserted James and ran to her father's side. James felt like a low heel, only twice as useless.

The old man waved his children aside. He got himself straightened up. His voice was weak, but clear. "I'm a plain man. I'm not a snob—like Bertie. I know all about you, Griddle. Irene may think she is in love with you. But I'm a fighter—and I'm fighting you. Understand?"

James said: "Sure. I understand. I can't fight you, though, Mr. Verplanck. I love Irene. I wouldn't hurt her, nor you." He took time out to gaze bleakly at Bertie, who flinched a little. "I'll say good night now. I got another fight on my hands."

"Fight!" snorted Oswald Verplanck. "Boxing! Featherfoot! And not even a champion! A second-rater!"

James looked at Irene, saw the ruins of his life in her pale, worried gaze upon her father. He wheeled and marched out of the Verplanck house, and this time he did not go back. He went home and walked the floor all night, driving Bitsy as crazy as a bedbug.

James would not work out the next day. He let Bitsy rave. He sat and thought. He went away back into his career and thought about it.

He had been a careful youth. He had coppered every bet, keeping his tool-shop, winning his fights without much effort, because of his boxing skill. He had been too busy to dissipate, even had he wanted to. He had come up the long, hard way, and he was almost a champion.

He was a boxing fool. He went back to last year, to the bout with Lou Fagin. His boxing had not prevailed then. The tough champion was a great man. James faced it. Fagin was a better man. All along, down deep, James had known his boxing skill could not keep Fagin off him long enough.

James sighed. Now it was better, now that he had finally admitted that to himself. The hazards of his love for Irene had not been entirely responsible for his lackadaisical training—should indeed have acted as a spur. He had known sub—*subconsciously*: that was the word—that Fagin could beat down the rapier with his two bludgeons, one on the end of each sturdy arm.

James got up and stopped thinking, and his head immediately stopped aching. He went down into busy New York and did an errand he felt he should have performed long before. While he was out, the phone rang and rang, but there was no one there to answer it.

He had time to go over to Jersey, to the factory, and clean up a few things. He did so. Bitsy was frothing at the mouth when James got back, because by that time the management of the Stadium was wondering whether or not to call off the bout, not having heard from James all day. But James was very calm and had nothing to say, changing into his tights, letting Bitsy abuse him and bandage his hands.

"If you get past the fifth," roared Bitsy, "maybe you can last. You have never been kayoed, even once—not even by Fagin. I should live to see you kayoed! You got to get on your toes and box him, y'unnastand! . . . But no! You do not unnastand anything! You are a mere shallow hell!"

James said nothing. He went down to the ring shrouded in a huge white bathrobe and his silence. He climbed between the ropes, and there was Fagin, shaking hands, grinning as usual, as if he were not about to knock the ears off James. Then there were celebrities, Dempsey in uniform, Tunney in his gold braid, Braddock, Galento, Constantino to challenge the winner—Lulu was growing, all right; Allie Stolz, the perennial challenger . . . James looked down at ringside.

Red Dye sneered up at him. Bertram Verplanck's nose was there. James

looked resolutely away—then shot his glance back with gulping disbelief.

Irene was there, after all! And on the other side of the blonde, pretty head was a fierce, sharp-eyed old man. The whole Verplanck family was present!

It was Bertie, of course. Bertie wanted to pin it in, to have Oswald see James get it, to see him flounder under the pommeling of Lou's busy fists. They had put a name on him—"second-rater"—and they were here to see it made official.

James gave them stare for stare. He was past all that nonsense now. This was no melodrama on the silver screen. There were no parts in this script for the Verplancks. He had done with all that today, when he had taken stock of himself. He had set fire to all his bridges, and the smoke was curling over the Stadium right now. He smiled at Irene; he glowered fiercely at her brother and father.

He went out and listened to Arnie Cowell, the referee. He touched hands again with honest, fighting, Champion Lou. He went back and shed the robe. Bitsy pleaded:

"Give with the featherfoot, James! Please, please, stay away from the murder in that Irisher!"

James nodded absently, gnawing at the mouthpiece. He tried the ropes, bending his knees, looking down at the assembled Verplancks. His face had gone expressionless; he did not even see them in that moment. . . .

The bell, and came Lou Fagin, like a thunderbolt, never asking any quarter, never giving any. He was like old Billy Petrolle, just a busy man, with two iron fists to rattle on a man's ears, battering, slamming, until something gave—never Lou's fists.

Instinctively, James put his feet to work. They danced, like Astaire, like Nijinsky. James floated on those magic dancing feet, his hands up-raised, scarcely bothering to pick off punches, so swiftly did he move. Lou grinned and plodded on, relentless, biding his time. James retreated, still dancing.

Once Lou stopped, beckoning James to fight, and the far-flung bleacher fans rioted to the gallant gesture. But James knew the first-round power of those fists. James did his dance, and it was high art, and no blow landed upon him that round—nor did he land a blow.

BITSY was all aglow. Bitsy was almost whispering. "You got it! Came back to you, in the night, maybe! You got them feathers back. Fagin will get arm-weary, James! In the sixth, maybe, he will be dog-tired, yet!"

James said nothing. He was very somber; his face was tight and drawn. He did not look at the Verplancks.

He went out at the bell and began to box.

Lou did not lose his grin. Again and again James made him miss, gliding in and out, sending that left, now, with its little message of sock. Lou's eye reddened, but Lou's dynamite was under James' nose, and a dozen times it seemed ready to explode. The second round went by, and James was already ahead, and he knew it.

Bitsy was stuttering with joy. Red Dye looked flabbergasted. The Verplancks sat quietly, signifying nothing. James fought the third and the fourth rounds without losing a point, piling it onto Lou with snakelike jabs.

"Inna bag!" crowed Bitsy, jumping about like a puppy. "By the nose, you got him! I am a fool to think my James is not smarty-party!"

BEFORE the fifth, James did a curious thing. He stood up between the whistle and the bell. He looked down at Irene. He looked over at Lou Fagin. Then he said, clearly in the pre-round hush: "That was my dish. Here's coming at you with yours, Lou!"

Lou blinked. The bell rang. Lou came piling out, all undiscouraged, still trying to make James fight. James went gliding to ring center. Lou led with a hard right.

James did not move away. James moved inside and threw his own right. Both punches exploded together. James went flying back into the ropes. Lou went skidding into the opposite ropes.

Lou beamed with pleasure, rushing back to the fray. James met him head on. Gloves blurred with speed, as the two gently touched their skulls together, bent a little at the waist and slugged. The blows went home with sickening thuds.

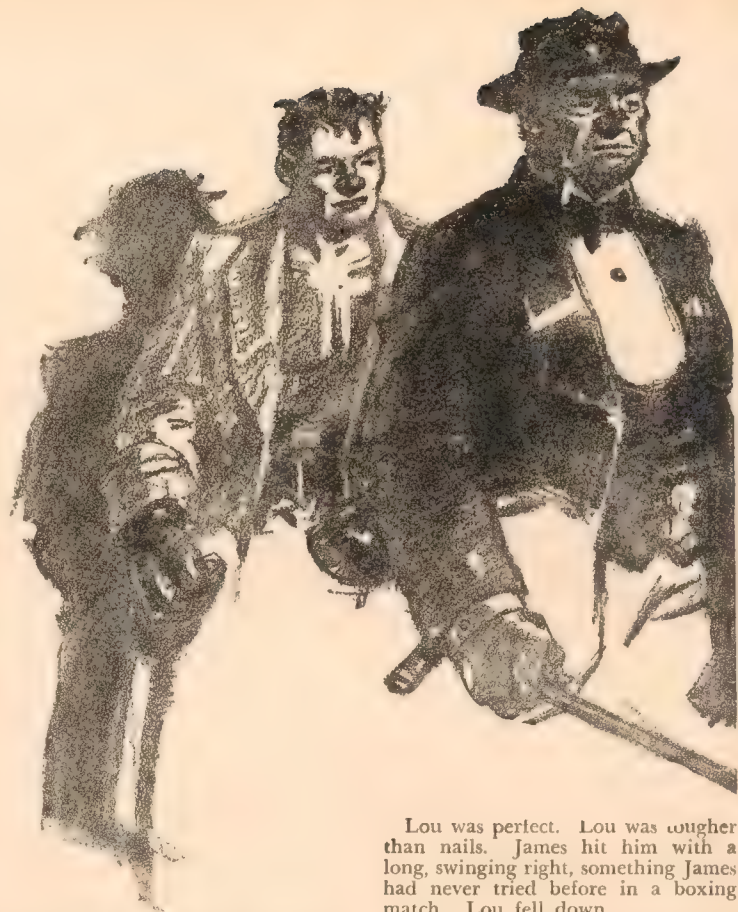
Bitsy was screaming in agony: "James! James! Have you gone nuts altogether! Back off! Back away!"

James was gasping for breath. His arms ached. He was not up to it, and he knew it. Lou clouted him with an inside right. James went on his pants and rolled over. He lay there, looking at Bitsy.

And now Bitsy was calm, silent, tense. It was a clutch, and Bitsy was fine in the tight spots. He held up his fingers as the count mounted. Six, seven, eight, nine—he made the gesture of lifting James to his feet, and James came up as if by Bitsy's sheer magnetism.

James was a bit punch-drunk. His legs were rubbery, and his feet were leaden. He staggered forward. Lou came and slugged; but somehow, Lou was slower too. James fell into a clinch and Lou seemed content, so James pushed him away and started clouting again with his tired arms.

Somehow or other that round ended. James got back to his corner and



closed his ears against Bitsy's ravings—only, Bitsy wasn't shouting at him. Bitsy was saying: "Breathe deep, yet. That's it. Smell the salts, James."

So James could think about it. He could think about tomorrow, when it would all be over, and they would be reading in the hinterlands and the far-flung cities about the swan song of James Featherfoot Griddle. It would be all right, if he could go another round or two. He felt the amazed joy of the crowd, the excitement which rippled over the Stadium.

He got up at the bell. He walked, not ran, to ring center. Lou came treading solidly, leveling his big guns. James met him with what James had, straight, sharp punches, right off the chest where his cocked right now lay. James was pitching those fireballs—and catching plenty, too.

He thought he went down twice in that round. It was getting pretty vague. There was blood in his mouth and he choked it down, for fear Arnie would know he was cut bad and stop it. This was too good to stop. He was having fun, now, with good old Lou.

Lou was perfect. Lou was tougher than nails. James hit him with a long, swinging right, something James had never tried before in a boxing match. Lou fell down.

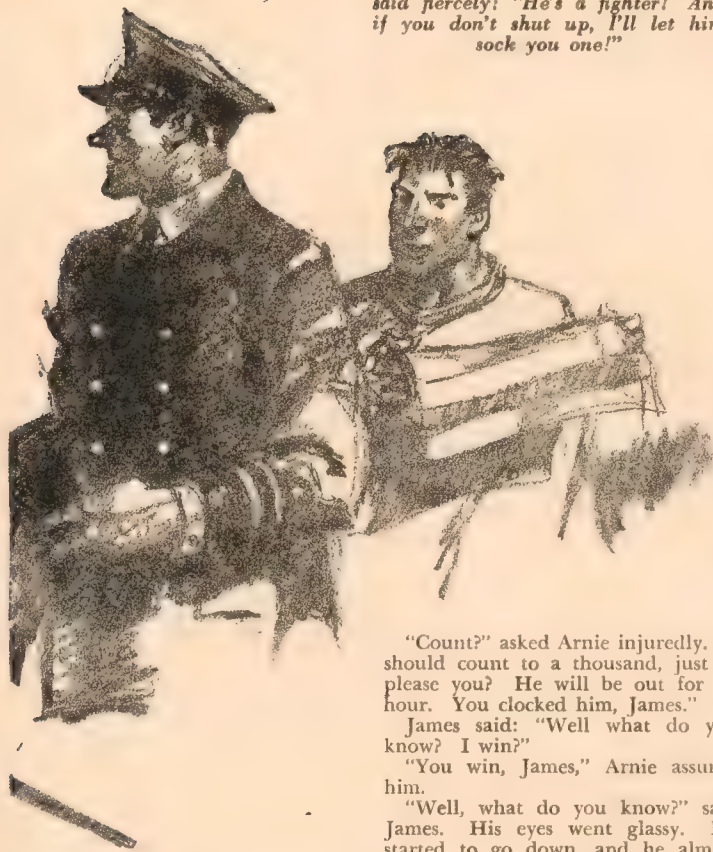
James almost forgot to go to a neutral corner, watching Lou on the canvas. It was the strangest thing! Lou seemed such a sturdy boy, so iron-clad. Yet there he was, and he looked pretty silly, too.

Of course Lou got up. Probably he'd slipped, James thought. The bell rang in some far distant land, and James got to his corner without tumbling, which was quite a feat.

MANY years later he came out of a fog. He looked around. He was sitting on the floor, and Bitsy was holding up three fingers. Bitsy was very grave and pale, but there was a light in Bitsy's keen little eyes. James nodded to show he was all right. He looked past Bitsy at the Verplancks, but with the lights the way they were, the Verplancks were just blobs in a mob of craning heads.

James got over on his knees, put one foot up under him. There was a lot of blood around and about. He located Lou, saw the grin fixed on Lou's face. He wondered what round it was, how Lou was doing. A great guy, that Lou. . . .

Bertie said: "Father!" And Oswald said fiercely: "He's a fighter! And if you don't shut up, I'll let him sock you one!"



James got up. Lou was coming, but slowly. It was funny how slow Lou had got since the beginning of the fight, all those many years ago. James put out his left hand, and Lou walked into it as if he was blind. James hoped poor Lou wasn't blind. He liked Lou.

He threw the right behind the left. He felt his knuckles crackle against bone. He must have slugged poor Lou pretty well on the button with that one. He drew it back, like the honest workman he was, and essayed to hit Lou on the button again.

There was no chin to hit. There was no Lou. Arnie was grabbing James by the arm, leading him away. James spat his mouthpiece into his glove and said to Arnie: "Where is Lou? What happened to him? Is he all right?"

Arnie said gravely: "No, he is not all right."

James pulled away, full of sorrow for his pal Lou. He looked, and Lou's handlers had come in and were carrying him out of the ring. James cried: "You didn't count over him! You got to give Lou a square break, Arnie!"

"Count?" asked Arnie injuredly. "I should count to a thousand, just to please you? He will be out for an hour. You clocked him, James."

James said: "Well what do you know? I win?"

"You win, James," Arnie assured him.

"Well, what do you know?" said James. His eyes went glassy. He started to go down, and he almost made it; at that, only Bitsy was right in there, grabbing him, propping him until the other handlers could come and support him to the corner. Everything was blurred for quite a while then, but the steady roar of the surf came through to his ears.

Only, it was not the ocean, but the crowd. They were standing on their chairs, reluctant to leave, shouting: "James! James! Old Featherfoot!"

He managed to get up and mitt them, and they let out all the stops, like an organ going full blast. The cops were around the ring, holding them out, or they would have had him. Lou came over, wabbly, pale.

James said: "I'm sorry, Lou."

Lou said: "Sorry, hell! You win square, pally."

James said: "Gee, Lou, I'm sorry. I—" But then Bitsy was racing him through the crowd, with cops sturdily pushing people out of the way. They got to the dressing-room.

James leaned against the wall. Bitsy turned and said: "Now, what in the hell is this?"

Irene came forward. Irene flung herself upon James and said: "You darling! You angel! You dope! You

could have boxed his ears off! But no, you got to fight him! You nice simple-minded idiot!"

Oswald Verplanck and Bertram Verplanck stood side by side, stiff as poker. Oswald cleared his throat. He said:

"Er—I thought you were a nonentity, sir. A nearly-good man. A—featherfoot!"

James said through his wounds: "Don't give me any of your guff, Mr. Verplanck! I'm asking Irene to marry me. To hell with you! And to double hell with Bertie!"

"Bertie," said Oswald Verplanck dryly. "Yes. A fool. I told him in the fourth you had Fagin. Won a hundred from him. Then when you fought, instead of picking him to pieces—why did you take the hard way, James?"

JAMES stared. He said: "Why I was sick of being—a featherfoot. I wanted to go out right. I figured to lose—I wanted my last fight to go in the books as a good one."

"Your last fight?" said Oswald. "Why, you're a great champion. Never saw a better—and I've seen 'em all!"

"He was amateur heavyweight champion when he was young!" cried Irene. Oswald preened himself just a little.

"Yeah," said James. "An amateur!" He let a little pause sink that barb into Oswald. He went on: "Today I quit for good. I joined the Army."

Irene squealed: "James!"

"As a private!" James said, sticking out his chin. "My factory can run itself. I'm going to see what a featherfoot can do in the war. I'm a Republican myself, but I'm no bottleneck! Maybe we make a few mistakes, but I'm goin' to fight if they'll let me!"

Oswald Verplanck blew his nose violently. He said: "Factory. Yes, yes. Maybe you'd let me take a look at it. Maybe you'd sort of let an old man help while you're away."

Bertie said: "Father!"

Oswald said fiercely: "He's a fighter! He's a champion—a pro champion. All my life I've envied pro champions! Now I'm getting one in the family, and if you don't shut up, I'll let him sock you one!"

"On the nose?" begged James. "Just once?"

Bertie retreated in bad order, all the way out the door the fascinated Bitsy held for him. Irene remained draped upon James' neck. Oswald Verplanck raised his hands and roared: "Bless you, my children! I will see you tomorrow, James!"

He followed, at a dignified pace, in the path of his son. Irene said: "James! My own darling James!"

Bitsy said: "It's just like a movie! A stinking movie yet, without cowboys and train-robbers!"

A Gentleman of Old

BY dawn the yellow-mustached Joseph Sandy and his young swamper had the jerkline outfit of eight pairs of matched iron-grays and two heavily loaded freight-wagons hitched tandem ready to roll. The owner of the ranch where they had camped had reported Apache bands were raiding all the way to Ironwood Springs; and the swamper, who had just come West, was shivering. He knew he wasn't going to like Arizona Territory.

"You're crazy fools to travel today," was the rancher's final word. "Apaches can see that outfit of yours miles off. It's fifty to one they'll git you."

"Who's skeered of them two-legged copper kettles?" scoffed Mr. Joseph Sandy, bulking huge in the saddle of

the near-wheeler. "Me, I'm due in Ironwood Springs today, by sunset sharp. It's a matter of life or death."

"So's Apaches," said the rancher ominously.

"Yo, Pete; yo, Gotch-earl!" bawled Mr. Sandy, each word like the *tump* of a mighty war-drum. Sixteen pairs of equine shoulders pushed against heavy collars. Then as the whip popped deafeningly, hoofs clumped and great wheels rumbled.

The swamper, whose duties were to help with the team, the hitching-up and feeding, besides setting brakes on grades, shivered again from his perch on the trailer wagon. Apaches! If they caught you alive, they'd stake you down and make you die hard and take a long time at it. This Arizona Ter-

ritory was a tough, ruthless land; and its men, judged by Joseph Sandy, a swearing, harsh, inhuman lot.

At breakfast, scared by the rancher's gloomy reports of Apaches, the swamper had tried to argue Mr. Sandy into waiting over. Mr. Sandy had fixed the swamper with a steely eye.

"Are you afeard?" he had demanded sternly, and the young swamper had been forced to state, weakly, that he was not.

Now the swamper clutched his rifle hard and looked apprehensively about



Arizona

A drama of the old West as it really was, by
the author of "Bells Up the Abo."

by RAY NAFZIGER



Illustrated by
Maurice Bower

*The ravenin' wolves raced at our heels,
Their slaverin' jaws stretched wide;
"Oh, throw the beasts our little babe!"
To my darlin' wife I cried.*

"It's a song I made up from tales my grandpap told me," Mr. Sandy explained to the swamper. "Stories of winters in Europe in the old days, when packs o' starved wolves chased people in sleds. When the varmints got too close, you'd start throwin' 'em children. Yeah, and finally the wife too, if you had to. Mighty tough, havin' to feed your family to the wolves, one by one; but our ancestors was the iron breed that could do it. —You, Gila!" he bellowed, and sent his long whip out at a horse. "That there singletree aint no damn' rockin' chair."

The swamper grunted sourly. Mr. Sandy, he judged, was a fit descendant of men who would throw their families to wolves to save themselves.

the mesa, wishing bitterly that he had never come to Arizona, and praying that he would live to get out of it.

Dawn lasted interminably while the outfit rolled into a range of hills. Just before sunup the slow siren of a lobo wolf floated from a ridge. Mr. Sandy, a Navy revolver in his belt and a Winchester carbine in a scabbard hung from a harness hame, raised an unmusical bellow in a tuneless song:

"He can't tell me he aint scared of Apaches himself," the swamper muttered. "If he saw one, he'd run like his shirt-tail was afire. The reason why he's hurryin' to git to Ironwood Springs by sunset is that he don't want to be caught out after dark."

At the foot of a small mountain, the freighter suddenly swung from the main-traveled road to take a pair of ruts which as they climbed steeply, went along ledges so narrow there was barely room for the wheels. When they came to a sharp-angled turn above a sheer hundred-foot drop, the swamper stared in horror and his hair literally rose; two wagons pulled by a jerkline team couldn't make the turn. Both wagons and horses would go over. If there had been a place to jump, the swamper would have jumped.

But Joseph Sandy, with the aid only of the slender rope that ran the length of the string of horses, calmly put the leader and swing pairs far to the outside edge. Then while the big wheelers stood almost still, pivoting on their dinner-plate-sized hoofs, the swing pairs, as Joseph Sandy called their names, one by one jumped the lead chain. The wide-rimmed wheels circled a few inches from the drop for the turn; and then up ahead the swing teams, as Mr. Sandy again called their names, stepped back over the lead chain. Making horses jump by just yelling at them, was horsemanship that had the swamper goggle-eyed.

"That short-cut saved us a few miles," explained Mr. Sandy, as they got back safely on the main road.

The swamper silently cursed Mr. Sandy. Risking their lives just to save a few miles, the fool! But he had to admit that fool or no fool, Mr. Sandy was a freighter.

"That was driving, Mr. Sandy," he called. "You sure got them horses trained."

Mr. Sandy snorted. "A lot of half-busted broncs that I'll take the skin off them alive if they don't roll us into Ironwood Springs by sunset! They aint trained; they're simply afraid of the human voice. Like all animals. Watch."

They were at the time passing through a small brushy cañon. Joseph Sandy began lifting an awe-inspiring bawl from his broad chest. Sounding at first like the roaring of a lion, it rose through a series of snarls to end in a high-pitched squall that was like the screech of a hysterical wildcat. On the slope above them, the swamper caught a brief glimpse of the tawny hide of some animal, maybe a cougar, departing swiftly for distant parts. Three panic-stricken deer raised their white tails as flags and fled with their horns rattling loudly against the brush. Partridges flew from trees; cot-

ontails scuttled for their holes, and squirrels frantically climbed pines.

"The human voice!" muttered the swamper sarcastically, as the hair at the back of his neck stiffened. "If you can call *that* human."

At noon they halted to put feed morrals on the horses, and to eat a lunch. In the north the sky was cast over with black clouds.

"Looks like rain," hazarded the swamper. "It'll keep the Apaches from seein' our dust."

"Apaches don't need to see no dust, button," said Mr. Sandy. "They smell out white men, same as buzzards smell dead critters."

The swamper's heart sank. With Apaches raiding this side of Ironwood Springs, what chance did they have?

They went on for two hours; then they dipped into a wide wash, ordinarily dry, but now filled with a roaring river. It was a flash flood from the rain to the north, and it would drop to a trickle in half an hour, but Joseph Sandy chewed his huge yellow mustaches and cursed.

"I aint a-waitin'," he announced. "I'm due in Ironwood Springs by sunset, and I got no time to lose."

Recklessly he flung the sixteen horses at the stream. Muddy water washed over the knees and up to their bellies. In midstream one of the swing horses got his feet in the stretchers of the span ahead. The wagons stopped and began to settle, while the whole team plunged, fighting against being swept downstream.

"Climb down and ontangle that fool critter," Joseph Sandy shouted back at his swamper.

"I—I don't know how to swim," quavered the youth.

"Who does, in these Arizony deserts?" returned Joseph Sandy. "Climb down thar, younker," he ordered sternly.

Reluctantly the swamper got down to wade into the water. He reached the tangled horse just as a fresh wave of water roared down the arroyo. The swamper gave himself up for lost, just before a huge hand gripped his collar, and bringing him out of the welter of plunging horses and angry waters, tossed him on the opposite bank. After which Joseph Sandy struggled back into the turmoil, cursing blasphemously. The half-drowned swamper watched. Twice the big freighter went under, and a dozen times he missed being brained by a flailing hoof, but he climbed finally to the saddle, and the team jerked the two wagons up on the far bank.

Then, with his clothes dripping muddy water, Mr. Sandy came back to the lead wagon and took out a white jug. "When wet, I'm a believer in drying from the inside out as well as from the outside in," he stated. "Take

a drink, younker, but leave a few drops for me, or I'll throw you back into that there arroyo."

One small swallow of the liquid left a fiery trail all the way down to the swamper's stomach. While his helper strangled and coughed, Joseph Sandy downed a good part of the jug's contents.

"More time lost. We got to travel," he growled, and patted a bulge in a vest pocket. "Got something here for a lady in Ironwood Springs that I promised to git there by sunset. Matter o' life and death." He swung in the saddle. "Gila, Yuma! Cochise, Geronimo!" he called, and the wagons rolled on.

So that was why Joseph Sandy was hurrying, thought the swamper. Because of an engagement with some tawdry short-skirted dance-hall siren. To deliver a promised bauble to some painted hussy! The swamper sneered. And for a little while he had thought that beneath his outer roughness, Joseph Sandy might possibly be a man of heroic stature. Glaring at the freighter now, the swamper lifted the carbine a little. Mr. Sandy ought to be shot. Risking getting them flayed alive by savages, because of a promise to a fancy woman!

One thing he was thankful for—so far at least, there was no evidence of marauding hostiles, no dust of distant horsemen.

In late afternoon, with the swamper riding the wagon just behind the wheelers, they climbed a brushy ridge. The sun had come out of the clouds, and the creak and rumble of wheels, the jingle of chains, the muted clump of sixty-four hoofs would have been a soothing song, if the swamper hadn't heard that Apaches liked just such ridges for ambush places. He sat tense, gripping his rifle hard, eyes suspicious of every moving branch.

As they topped the ridge, Mr. Sandy stopped to breathe his team and to squint at the lowering sun. "We'll make it on time," he said.

"If we don't run into no Apaches," quavered the swamper.

Joseph Sandy guffawed. "Forgit them copper kettles, younker! No Injuns has been off of the reservation for months. That was just a hooraw the rancher put on you last night to scare you—sayin' Apaches was raidin' this country. He was only testin' out your nerve."

"Just a joke, was it?" asked the swamper, boiling with rage over his hours of unnecessary worry.

Joseph Sandy nodded. "Course in Arizony you can't never tell when Injuns will bust out next. There's no—"

Mr. Sandy abruptly creaked about in his saddle, while the swamper stood up on the load. A burst of gunfire below them had made a sudden clap



"Apaches don't need to see no dust," said Mr. Sandy. "They smell out white men, same as buzzards smell dead critters."

of thunder. The explosions came evidently from the vicinity of a little adobe ranch-house and a log barn, a quarter of a mile or so down the slope. Now, far more ominous than the guns, sounded a hideous squalling.

Apaches!

The swamper's heart failed him; a strangled yell of terror came to his throat and was smothered there.

Puffs of smoke came from windows in the back and front of the house, marking the frantic attempts of defenders to throw back the savages. Next instant the log stable was ablaze.

The freight outfit was hidden by a thick screen of oak brush, but the swamper began to shiver violently.

Joseph Sandy calmly tore off a huge chunk of twist tobacco and rolled it about his mouth.

"What you know?" he said in mild astonishment. "That ornery Gib Whaley hoss-thief and his growed boy is in a shore-nough tight spot. Gib and me allus been on the outs since he tried stealin' a dun pony off me. I'd kinda enjoy seein' the snake-blood massacred."

"We can unhook the leader horses and slip around to ride to Ironwood," suggested the swamper, trying to control his chattering teeth. "We aint been seen yet. When we reach the Springs, we can have help sent out for the Whaleys."

Mr. Sandy shook his head. "Help'd git out too late to keep the Whaleys from bein' massacred. And I wouldn't want to help 'em, no ways. It aint the Whaleys what's worryin' me; it's the time I'll lose sittin' here. I'm due in the Springs by sunset."

Joseph Sandy, standing in his stirrups to look at the battle, suddenly sat back and pulled the brake-release rope. "I'm goin' down through there," he announced. "You better drop off and hide in the brush until it's over."

The swamper stared at Joseph Sandy, astounded. "But I thought you said Gib Whaley was a enemy of yours."

"Shore," admitted Mr. Sandy. "Like I said, it aint Gib I'm carin' about—it's the gittin' late into the Springs if I wait. Hop down; this might turn out serious."

The swamper gulped and then gripped his carbine hard. "I'm goin' where you're goin'," he stated.

"Bueno," said Joseph Sandy, and quietly got the wagons rolling. Then as the road turned down the slope, Mr. Sandy's bawl came from his broad chest, and his big whip popped louder than the exploding guns below. The big horses went from a trot into a lumbering lope, yanking along the heavily loaded vehicles. With the increased speed, the big wheels bounced high, crashing down on rocks like thunder, while above them the top-heavy loads swayed perilously.

THE swamper clung to the rope over the tarp of the load he rode, noting, in spite of his terror, the skill with which Joseph Sandy kept the strung-out team tight from wheelers to leaders.

The red-skinned attackers, astounded by the thundering approach of a harness-horse freight-wagon charge, stopped firing. Half a dozen renegades who had been crawling up on the house so far forgot themselves as to stand upright.

"Pour lead into 'em!" bellowed Joseph Sandy at the swamper, and drew his own carbine from its hame scabbard to open fire. The wagons were rolling over a comparatively level stretch, and the swamper managed to get his own rifle into action.

Back on the trail wagon, the end of the tarpaulin came loose, flying high into the air, like the billowing sail of a boat. Maybe it was the tarp, or maybe it was the charge, the shooting, or the awful bawling of Joseph Sandy, or the combination—at any

rate, the dozen or more renegades deserted the battle to race to their horses and gallop away.

With the harsh rasp of brakes against iron-shod wheels, Joseph Sandy pulled up before the door of the ranch-house. A gray-bearded wisp of an old fellow stepped out, followed by a younger man.

"You shore saved our hides, Joe Sandy," said the oldster. "Aint another freighter in Arizony could of galloped a jerkline outfit down off that hill; and if any could, they wouldn't of charged a flock of 'Paches. Climb down, Joe Sandy. Me and my boy Jim got a jug of whisky, and we'd be proud to drink to you. Aint another man like you in the hull Territory of Arizony. You and me has had trouble in the past, and I want to apologize for it now."

"To hell with you, and your apology, and your rotgut whisky!" roared Joseph Sandy. "I didn't save your hoss-stealin' hides a-purpose. I got important business in the Springs by sunset; that's why I come down here to scatter them copper kettles. Matter of life and death." And again Mr. Sandy, reminded of his gift for his lady friend, patted his vest pocket to make sure the package was unharmed. "Yo, Pete! Yo. Gotch-ear!"

His whip popped, and the wagons rolled on, with the swamper shaking his head.

"I simply can't figure him out," he muttered. "Talkin' just like he hated to save Gib Whaley from the 'Paches, but doin' it anyhow. He's got no more heart than a petrified snapper turtle, and yet—"

ACROSS a flat, after an hour, they approached the scattered adobe buildings of Ironwood Springs mining camp. The sun was just touching the horizon when Mr. Sandy cut across

vacant blocks to come into a residence street.

There beside a house all but hidden behind a high adobe wall, Mr. Sandy halted. Descending from the saddle, he carefully twisted his yellow mustaches into sharp points and dusted his clothes and sombrero with his neckerchief. Then putting a fresh crease in his sombrero and taking from his vest pocket a small package, he opened a wooden gate in the wall and walked inside. To the swamper, the house looked like a private home, but it had to be of course some kind of dance-hall.

"I'm having me a look at the painted hussy that made that crazy fool risk his life and mine," the swamper said to himself. "And then it's goodbye to Arizona for me."

As he climbed up on one of the big rear wheels to look over the wall, he could hear the freighter's deep voice coming from the yard.

"Miz Tewksbury, ma'am, I seen Doc Smith in Tucson, and I told him of the sweats and fevers and aches and pains that's been afflictin' your daughter. Doc, he turned all their symptoms over and studied 'em, and he figured a long while, but finally he said he knew exactly what she had. Your daughter suffers with one of the most terrible and uncommon diseases which ever clamps its jaws on the human race."

"What is the disease, Mr. Sandy?" inquired a dulcet voice filled with a natural anxiety.

"Doc Smith called it the inflammatory and rapid perambulating galvanic hop-scotch-itis. A rare disease that Doc Smith luckily happened to have just the very medicine needed to restore your daughter to plumb perfect health. One teaspoon every hour until the bottle is gone, and she'll be smilin' and happy once more."

The swamper, by standing on the hub of the big wheel, was able finally to look over the wall. Under a mulberry tree was a girl of six or seven, holding in her hand a bottle of dark liquid, and bending over a cradle containing a doll almost as big as herself.

Then the dulcet voice spoke again. "Mr. Sandy, sir, I shall never forget what you have done in bringing the medicine to save the life of my poor sweet darling, Bernadine Gladys. Day and night I have paced the floor, praying you would come in time. Mr. Sandy, I have cried my eyes almost from my head, from the grief that only a mother can feel. My dear little child will owe her life to you forever and forever and forever."

The swamper got down from the wheel slowly and went up to pat the thick neck of a wheeler. The swamper was grinning from ear to ear. He had an idea he was going to like Arizona Territory.





Flags of our Fathers - VII

Banner of New England

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

ABNER GRIDLEY had inherited his farm, a pleasant, secluded place along the Acushnet River, back a piece from Buzzard's Bay and straggling New Bedford. It lay untilled and unkempt and by no means prosperous, as the old log cabins about the newer house testified. Gridley had not been to town in six months—for reason.

Four years ago the men of New England had besieged and taken the supposedly impregnable French for-

trass of Louisburg, at Cap Breton. Then, in 1745, Abner had been eighteen. He had left his left hand at Louisburg, and his father Caleb Gridley had died there.

A one-handed man is no use at the fishing, and of small use at farming. Abner Gridley drank; he roamed the woods; last winter, down in New Bedford, he had raised the very devil and was done for there. Downright shiftless, was the verdict, and him such a young man! Hunting, fishing, trap-

ping, cavorting with the godless redskins—no wonder the old Gridley place was going to rack and ruin! Caleb Gridley had been captain of the militia, too, which made it worse.

Abner was twenty-two now, dour and shrewd for his age, burnt brown like an Indian, his left hand replaced by an iron hook with which he was deft, wearing moccasins instead of boots. He had a good deal of book-learning, indeed more than most; he could jabber Micmac with the red-

skins, forecandle lingo with sailors, or book-talk with a preacher.

The stranger turning his saddle-horse in at the dilapidated gateway was none of these. He had a soldierly bearing, hard resolute features, eyes as keenly alert as those of Abner; they were twinkling blue eyes, whereas Abner's were a merry, dancing black like all the Gridleys. But all the Gridleys were dead now, except angry worthless young Abner.

"A GOOD morning to you!" The visitor swung from his saddle and extended a hearty grip to Abner, who had been cleaning his rifle in the shade of an apple tree. "You must be Abner Gridley; a peddler down the road told me this was your place. I'm George Tressilis, late captain in His Majesty's Fourteenth Foot, and now visiting the colonies. I've ridden out from New Bedford for a bit of talk with you."

"Morning," rejoined Abner. "Aint left much for me to say, have you?"

They broke into a laugh together, while each eyed the other. Tressilis, reins over arm, took in the untended trees, unpainted buildings, unplowed fields. He was well dressed and freshly shaven; Abner was neither.

"I was directed to you," said the Englishman, "by Captain Joshua Quincy. His daughter, Mistress Betsy, sent you her warm greetings, and he did not."

A slight flash came and went in the dark eyes of Gridley.

"You seem aware of the situation down to Bedford," he said dryly. "Cap'n Joshua loads his schooner with ice and takes it down to Jamaica, fetches molasses home and turns it into rum; Injuns trade pelts for the rum, New York traders pay hard money for the pelts, none of your worthless rag money, and Cap'n Joshua sets smug in prayer-meeting. I'm just a worthless hound and he's a reg'lar Praise-God Barebones and runs everything in town."

Tressilis smiled but did not miss the undertone of bitterness.

"Well, sir, we may change all that!" he said heartily. "In fact, Captain Quincy has pointed out the way."

"Then I'd better make sure the cat aint skunk," replied Gridley in his best Yankee drawl. "Last time I was in Bedford, I sure disgraced myself for life. . . . Well, let it pass. It's wearing on to noon, Mr. Tressilis. I've got johnnycake in the oven, rum in the bottle, moose meat that's been hanging a spell in the springhouse, and plenty of time. Will you join me, and talk when we've et?"

"With all my heart!" said the visitor. "Welcome the coming, speed the parting, guest. The true Homeric

adage, brought to life here in New England!"

"Where the elegant Athenian expected to find only a crude Boeotian countryman," Abner murmured wick-edly. He ignored the chagrined surprise of Tressilis at this knowledge of the classics, and turned. "Come along! The horse will crop the grass. We'll be comfortable in the kitchen—I don't use the rest of the house much. Don't open it up, in fact, except for spring cleaning."

HE led the way around the little farmhouse, which appeared to have missed its spring cleaning thus far, to the kitchen; this was spacious, homey and spotless. Thereafter, for a while, Gridley was far too busy for aimless talk; but when he and his guest finally sat down to their meal, it was worth sitting down to and they did it full justice. Also, they had become better acquainted and Abner Gridley realized that the Englishman had something on his mind.

"There seems to be a surprising amount of feeling in New England," observed Tressilis when they had shoved back chairs and lighted pipes, "over the peace treaty with France."

"Feeling isn't the word for it," said Gridley. "But why surprising?"

"Well, His Majesty's gov'ment handed back Louisburg to France, in exchange for Madras in India, and a



Gridley found himself under a shower of blows.



Next morning a new Abner Gridley walked to town.

jolly good bargain too. Yet your people in Boston are positively boiling about it!"

"My people?" repeated Gridley. "Aye, my people; right enough. This fortress of Louisburg has a huge strategic value, in relation to New England."

"But after all, it was the English fleet under Sir Peter Warren that took it!"

"It was—what?" Gridley almost choked on the word. He laid down his pipe. "Hark'ee, my friend. I went to Louisburg, with my father, who was killed there. Our friends and neighbors went. Men from all New England went—and did the work. Your four little British ships—bah!" He snapped his fingers.

Tressilis smiled. "No offense, sir. I was not there, you know."

"I was." Gridley moved his iron hook. "Louisburg was taken by New England; by our own men, our militia and trained bands, by our own military force. And your English politicians have the infernal gall to barter our conquest, not theirs, for a heathen city on the other side of the globe! It was New England took Louisburg, which your armies and navy could not do. We New Englanders sha'n't forget it and don't forget it. We're as good as any royal armies in the world, and well do we know it!"

"Well, I hear Parliament is paying you hard cash to make it right," Tressilis said amiably.

"True; it's a sore subject none the less." Ashamed of his heat, Abner Gridley picked up his long clay and puffed it alive. He nodded toward

the bulk of the house. "I've a flag in there, an old flag made in the early days for our militia of the Three Counties to use. It was used in King Philip's War and in others. My father carried it to Louisburg; I carried it back. A flag of New England, of America, the first to see conquest and victory!"

"Why, yes! Captain Quincy spoke of it," said Tressilis, tamping down his pipe. "He intends to speak with you about it at the first opportunity. It would give me great pleasure to see it, Mr. Gridley. And other things. I understand you have many historic treasures."

"Nonsense! Many family heirlooms and all useless truck." Gridley liked the frank, open air of his visitor, but frowned sharply. "So Cap'n Joshua is fretting his mind about that flag, is he? I wonder why? He's a pestilent rogue when he takes a notion."

"Oh, it's something about the flag belonging to the local militia," the other replied carelessly.

"And so it does, but in my father's keeping, and mine after him. Well, let it pass." Gridley rose. "The house needs airing. Let me open it for you and unearth the flag, and you shall see what you like."

OPENING doors and windows, he brought Tressilis into astonishing spotless rooms that might have been inhabited yesterday. Here were luxuries, for the pioneer country, of books and furniture and fine linen and portraits, all of the best.

In a room that was full of snowshoes and other winter gear, and guns and powder-horns and such things,

Gridley opened a little old-fashioned trunk. From it he took a roll, wrapped on the outside with soft doeskin, and inside with woolen stuff. This he opened on a table, to display the flag.

A big square of crimson cloth it was. Upon this plain field, partly embroidered in tarnished silver and partly heightened with oil colors, was an armored hand grasping a dagger, with three cannonballs and the legend "*Vince aut Morire.*"

"Conquer or die," said Gridley. "The cannonballs stand for the Three Counties—it was designed and wrought in England, by report. Not a great thing for an English soldier to view; doubtless you have seen many finer and nobler standards. But for this poor land of poverty it holds rich feeling."

"Why, so it should!" said Tressilis warmly. "The regimental colors are ever close to a soldier's heart, friend Gridley."

"Regimental colors?" repeated the New Englander thoughtfully. "I think you miss the point. We have no regiments; our militia are townsmen and farmers and sailors. Such an emblem as this must mean, to us, what the Royal Standard does to you."

"No, no! That were close to treason in another mouth," exclaimed Tressilis. "You are colonials, of our own blood; our king is yours, our land is yours—"

"We differ there," broke in Gridley quietly. "I was born here, not overseas. This flag was borne by men fighting for their own land, not for one afar. It smells of powder fired to win and secure these hills, these towns

and shores, for ourselves and not for a king across the water. England is yours, not ours; New England is ours, not yours."

Tressilis nodded. "I see your meaning; you are right. Conceivably, the meaning might be a dangerous one; if one could imagine by some far flight of fancy that this little New England of yours were in arms against the majesty of the mother country—"

"Then this bit of cloth, let me promise you, would be carried by the Bedford men!" cried Gridley. Their eyes met. . . . Then, simultaneously, they broke into a smile.

"Pray God, that time will never come," Tressilis exclaimed easily. He glanced down into the trunk. "What's here? Documents?"

"Of a sort, yes. My father was much interested in such things as pertain to the history of the colony; he gathered them from all quarters. These are letters and memoirs of the early days."

"Well, look here!" said the visitor, impetuously. "Why don't you—that is—well, what I mean to say is—dash it all, Gridley, will you part with 'em?"

Gridley laughed. "Certainly! I've already promised them, in fact, to Mr. Hutchinson of Boston—he's the Speaker of the House. He's writing a history of the colony, and already has a notable collection of such documents as these. But why would you want them?"

"To go with the place." Tressilis faced around suddenly. "I'd like to purchase this farm of yours, Gridley—the house, everything in it, the land and all. I'll not haggle over the price, if you'll agree to sell. Name your own figure."

Gridley looked at him in astonishment, then in laughing amusement.

"What's the joke, Tressilis? You, an Englishman, a lobsterback officer, want to buy a farm here? No, no—you're in merry mood and jesting—"

"I'm not!" broke in the other. He colored slightly. "Look here, it's a question of a young lady. She has seen this place and thinks it perfection; I believe it could be made into a charming estate. If our marriage takes place, I'd like nothing better than to spend a few years hereabouts."

"Best discuss it outside," said Gridley, his dark features a little darker.

HE stooped and put back the flag. Anger and dismay leaped within him. Tressilis must have sensed it.

"No offense meant, you know," he began awkwardly. Gridley cut him short.

"None taken," he said, and banged the window shutters. "Come along."

They returned to the kitchen, Gridley closing up the front part of the house again. On the back porch were stools; he led the way here and settled down, with pipes and tobacco pouch.

Before them were lush grass and apple trees, with the log springhouse and other structures, a peaceful scene stretching to the untilled meadowland beyond.

"I'm afraid you'll think I'm a frightful blunderer," said Tressilis. "I did speak of it with Captain Quincy, you know. He thought you might advantage yourself by selling—"

"Oh, yes, with cash in hand!" struck in Gridley. "That's Cap'n Joshua all over. Money makes the mare go. Y'know, I was thinking of what you said, inside there." His dark eyes rested meditatively on the trees. "I've no particular liking for the place; I might sell, but the price would be high."

"Money's no object, upon my word. I'm willing to pay for what I fancy."

"I don't doubt it. Y'know Cap'n Joshua's tight-fisted as all hell—hm! Is his schooner in harbor?"

"Yes. A very trim little craft she looks, too."

"And has fetched slaves from Cuba on occasion. Hm! Yes, I might sell; why not? Can't give you an answer today. I'll sleep on it. May be in Bedford tomorrow; I'll look you up."

"Do so. I'm at the tavern. There's no haste, really."

"Has the young lady you mention given her answer?"

"No," said Tressilis. "But I have every reason to think—that is—"

"It's settled with her father, eh? I see. But Betsy has a mind of her own."

"I didn't say—"

"Didn't need." Gridley looked suddenly at his guest. The look was like a blow. "Cap'n Joshua didn't tell you I'd courted Betsy myself, did he? No. He kicked me out hard. Oh, you don't need to be confused, Tressilis! I've nothing to offer Betsy. Yes, she always did like the place here. If she wants it, and you to boot, why shouldn't she have it?"

Tressilis was amazed, dismayed, apologetic, and spoke out like a man. He had not known; he would none of it! Gridley laughed him down.

"Cap'n Joshua's little joke. No, as I say—if Betsy wants it, let her have it! I'll be along tomorrow. She didn't say I had any interest in her, eh? Or she didn't know your purpose in coming here."

"That's it; naturally, it was not mentioned to her." Tressilis stood up. "I regret most deeply that—"

"Regret nothing!" Gridley clapped him on the back. "All's for the best."

"What shall I tell Captain Quincy about the flag?"

"Bid him to the devil for me. A warped, money-mad man who'd sell his soul for a ten-penny profit!"

They shook hands and Tressilis rode away, friendly and stanch but a bit bewildered.

Abner Gridley resumed work on his rifle. Warm regards, eh? A neat message; he had sent her none in return. It was six months since he had set eyes on her. He thought back to that night, when Cap'n Joshua had kicked him out into the snow; Cap'n Joshua, just back from the Havannah with winter molasses stowed above and below, and every man jack of his crew jingling Spanish dollars, and Abner Gridley shown the door. After that, chaos.

A wild night it had been at the tavern: Hot rum, a brawl with two seamen, the mate Zeke Candler mixing in, Abner Gridley with rum and despair rioting in his brain; Zeke with his scalp laid open, two seamen down, others fisting bottles and knives to down the one-handed man. Then a break out and away into the snow for home, and a sullen curse on the village lights and men.

Not a nice memory, any of it. He lifted the rifle-barrel on his hook, sighted down the bore, and laid the iron aside shining and spotless. So this fine Britisher had come along and meant to stay! He had everything; them as has, gets. Wealth and stalwart youth and life, a fine fellow to take a girl's eye—far better than a penniless maimed outcast with an empty pack and a sorry reputation.

And the schooner was in. Therefore Zeke Candler would be in town, and his crew.

NEXT morning a new Abner Gridley walked the few miles to town—booted and shaved, fine blue broadcloth with brass buttons, snowy linen, dark lean features cheerfully aglow, iron hook unstrapped from stump and left at rest.

He came out upon the dusty post-road and tramped into the village. It lay on both sides of the river, a straggle of houses, a tavern, a meeting-house, sloping gently down to the water of the bay, a town still too occupied with the sea to bud forth inland. A schooner and two others lay to the wharves, and the sheds sent a redolent perfume stealing along the breeze.

The Quincy house was shiny white, spick and span with flower-beds and picket fence, bluntly commanding in its view of the bay. Cap'n Joshua had the front gate off and was at work repairing the hinges. He was a hard-bitten, angular man of forty-odd with a jaw like iron. He did not look up until Gridley walked in at the gateway and saluted him.

"Morning, Cap'n! The top of the morning to you and many of them."

Quincy straightened up, blinked at him, and stifled.

"So it's you! Well, consarn me if you don't look like a new man, Abner!"

"Money makes a heap of difference, don't it?" drawled Gridley. "Hear you want to see me about the militia flag. I aim to have a talk with you, too. Been thinking of investing my hard money in your schooner, maybe; want your advice anyhow."

"Did he buy your place?" demanded the skipper with avid curiosity. Evidently Tressilis had been close-mouthed. Gridley laid a finger along his nose and winked.

"Never mind, never mind! Before talking, I want to see Miss Betsy. Got any objection?"

CAP'N JOSHUA looked at him for a moment, lips pursed, greedy eyes appraising. He did have objections and plenty of them. But there was the flag. And—investing his money, eh? Then the farm had been or would be sold.

"Reckon not," he rejoined, grudgingly. "She'd ought to be cooking dinner. Go around."

Gridley went around to the back door and walked in and stood silent.

Betsy Quincy stared at him, stirring-ladle in hand, as though frozen. There was in her nothing of her father. Her eyes, startled at the moment, were wide and lovely; her parted lips were lovely; she was all lovely and palpitant and eager, but capable in the bargain.

"Abner!" she exclaimed. "You! Your old self!"

"Meetin'-clothes," he said. "Been packed up a long while. Right good still." He caught his breath. "Well, I got to ask you, Betsy. About him. The Englishman. And the farm—"

"Where've you been all this time, Abner Gridley?" she broke out. A tide of color rushed into her face. "Why haven't you come near us, after that night? You know what folks have been saying about you?"

"Heard tell," he said, and steadied. "Look, now. I aim to do what you say. If you want him and the farm—"

"Oh! I heard last night. It was shameful! I didn't dream why he wanted to see you. I could have gone straight down into the ground. . . . Abner, you didn't think—"

"No, I didn't," he broke in upon her confusion, and took courage from it. "But he's a mighty fine man, Betsy, and sound, and he can offer you a lot I can't, and I figure that maybe you love the old farm and him too, and should have it. I made an all-fired fool of myself that night and—"

"Stop it!" she cried out at him, and he stopped. "You silly, I love the old farm because it's *you*! You never gave me a chance to tell you, that night. And I thought you'd come back but you never did. . . . Well, don't stand there like a lummo! Tressilis is a nice man, yes; there are thousands of nice men in the world. But there's only one of you—"



"Abner!" Betsy exclaimed, "Where've you been all this time? You know what folks have been saying about you?"

Abner Gridley wakened to the truth abruptly, almost violently. He was not sure what happened next until he heard Betsy speaking, her face upturned to his in tears and laughter:

"Money! You big goose, what does that matter? Oh, I'll call you names whenever I please; I'll call you names all the rest of my life! Of course the money's important—but it doesn't matter to me if you haven't a rag shilling! Or to either of us. There's the farm and each other—a home, a thing to work at, and being together!"

"But, Betsy!" he exclaimed. "You don't understand what it means to bring you down to poverty! A body must have money to get married on!"

"You never heard of folks starving to death, did you, when they had love and land and a mind to work?" she cut in. "And you never will. Where does everything necessary come from, anyway—from the work, or from some higher source? You'd have called it God once, Abner, before you got resentful and angry about your hand; and you've got to come back to look at things the right way."

"Maybe I will," he said, gently. The rugged lines of his brown features softened. "Yes, I reckon so. Why, I never dreamed for a minute you could feel this way! What about your pa?" he added, suddenly aware of practical affairs. "What about the Britisher?"

*Illustrated by
Herbert Morton Stoops*



A laugh stole into her face. "I settled him last night, after I found out about that awful farm idea. I just told him the truth; he's a fine man, like you say."

HEAVY steps sounded; they drew apart swiftly and Betsy turned to the stove as Cap'n Quincy shoved into the kitchen.

"I aim to have a word with you, Abner, right now," he said. "There's queer goings-on over to the tavern. Mr. Tressilis and that body-servant of his have been making trouble; they tell me he's been drinking, which don't hardly seem possible. Anyhow, I got to settle with you about that flag—"

"Other things too," said Gridley. "Well, what about the flag? What you want it for?"

"There's talk about forming a new militia band, Abner. Of course, with your hand gone and all, you wouldn't want to be in it. Then you'll be leaving us, I suppose?"

"Hadn't thought about it, Cap'n. Who said so?"

"Well, with your farm sold and all—"

"It isn't sold and won't be," Gridley broke in. "And far from leaving, I'm settling down to work my farm. And if there's any militia formed, I'll be in it with the flag, same as my father was."

Cap'n Quincy opened his trap-mouth and snapped it shut again.

"Hm!" he grunted. "But you said as much—you talked about investing your money! If you aint sold your farm, where'd you get it?"

"That's for you to find out. I'd better keep my promise to Tressilis and have a word with him—" Gridley paused, at a significant look and a nod from Betsy. "Oh, want me to tell him?"

"Why not?" she replied. He smiled and turned again to Cap'n Quincy.

"All right. Betsy and I are getting married, Cap'n. And you're not doing any kicking out today—not any. So put that with the rest in your pipe and smoke it."

Cap'n Quincy was taken aback once more. Red wrath gathered in his eyes, but Gridley merely smiled as he spluttered.

"You—you consarned ne'er-do-well! What's got into you?" he began.

Gridley cut him short.

"Powder-smoke, maybe, from smelling that old flag. And Betsy's spunk. And my own self-respect. Don't you spit out any of your sea-oaths at me, you slave-running old hypocrite!" He

The man was declaiming on the demerits of New England. Gridley perceived at once that the three seamen were in a fury.

launched suddenly into hard, terse words, a savage glitter in his eyes. "One hand or not, I can lick the living daylight out'n you now or any time, and you'd better know it! No name-calling, now. I can go you better at that too, and without any oaths, you hard-shelled barnacle! You've got rag money for a heart and about as much bowels of kindness as a wood-louse or a Micmac Injun—"

Cap'n Quincy moved hastily away from that threatening, resolute visage. He kept on moving. He backed out of the doorway, with Gridley following him closely; startled alarm had replaced his anger, and when the younger man put hand to belt as though for a weapon, Cap'n Quincy uttered a shout, whirled about, and fairly legged it away.

Gridley turned, waved his hand to Betsy, in the doorway, and called:

"Back as quick as I see him. Get packed. I'll be back with a horse and wagon, and we'll drive off in style."

He could borrow a horse and wagon, he knew; he could raise a little money, too, by going to Ezra Drew, up at the

other end of town, and clapping a mortgage on the farm. Enough to get married on, at least, and get his crops started. Plans, eager ambitions, were surging in him as he headed for the tavern.

He was seeing things for the first time; himself, his future, what he could really do. That amazing talk with Betsy had made a new man of him—although it might be that he had been slowly ripening for such a moment. Fate has a way of preparing a man to see with new eyes when the time comes. New awareness may come in a jiffy, sudden comprehension may leap into the mind, but only when the subject is ready for it. The abrupt conversion of St. Paul had more behind it than is usually supposed.

AS Gridley approached the tavern, Tressilis came out, a bit uncertainly, passing a hand across his eyes, standing gulping in the fresh sea air. He had been drinking, certainly, but was far from extremes. He recognized Abner and greeted him warmly.

"Ha! Well met, Gridley, well met! Gad, you don't look the same person! Your hand, sir; lucky fellow, I give you the deepest best wishes, and envy you with all my heart!"

"Then you know, do you?"

"Aye." Tressilis took his arm. "Step inside with me—that man of mine is vastly comic. You'll enjoy his solemn asininity. Stubborn fellow, Haskins; pig-headed to a degree, and your yokels don't appreciate his good points—come along!"

Gridley found himself inside the tavern. At a table in the main room sat three men whom he knew at once, members of Cap'n Joshua's crew; and with these sat a stub-nosed loud-voiced little man declaiming hotly on the beauties of old England and the demerits of New England, and obviously drunk.

He perceived at once that the three seamen were in a fury, and that Tressilis was quite blind to the menace of the scene. The three gave Gridley a glance, exchanged a word, and from the rear of the tavern came a swaggering lanky figure. This was the mate, Zeke Candler.

At sight of Gridley, the lanky mate halted.

"Blow me down if it aint the hero of Louisburg!" he roared out. "Sunday-meetin' clothes and all! I've been hoping for another talk with you in daylight, Mister, when you couldn't run off like an Injun and take to cover."

Gridley held up his empty-ended sleeve.

"It'll have to be another time, Zeke, if you're after trouble," he said quietly. "See, I left my iron hand at home, purposely; I don't want any mischief today—"

"Oh, you don't! Since when are your wants so high and mighty?" flattered Candler. He advanced as he spoke, with clear intent. "We got a bone or two to pick with you. And the time is right now when you aint got your hook along. So make up your mind to it, you durned Injun half-breed!" A sharp yelp came from him. "Go for his tarnation scalp, boys!"

Headstrong, impetuous, he plunged forward. The three seamen at the table leaped up and joined him. Gridley, almost before realizing what was going on, found himself swept into a corner under a shower of blows. The mate's fist hammered at him; the others were trying to get to him. Against this unleashed storm he kept a cool head, parrying deftly with his blunted wrist.

The four were falling over one another in their frantic rage. He dropped Candler with a lucky blow, and as the mate rose, drove in his booted toe to the man's face. Zeke yelled blood and murder: They became savage, all of them, scooping up pewter mugs and letting drive like madmen. Hit over the ear by a heavy mug, Gridley staggered; another crack sent him stumbling back against the wall, desperately trying to save himself.

"Why, ye damned curs, to beat down a crippled man!" blared a voice.

This was Tressilis, into it furiously and hotly—but so were others by this time. Another brace of the crew; drunken stub-nosed Haskins and the tavern-keeper; two grooms and the town constable, all in a mad welter of oaths and yells, everybody cutting loose at everybody else. Under this fury, Abner Gridley went down, senseless. . . .

As to what took place next, he never did learn.

When he came to himself, it was in futile rags. His clothes were in rags; four men were holding him, and he was being efficiently doused in the horse-trough outside the tavern. All around were groaning hurt men, wreckage of the fray; Zeke Candler, with broken nose, was spouting profane accusations.

A crowd had collected and voices were buzzing high on the sunlight. Looking on in severe majesty were the selectmen, the preacher from Concord, and Cap'n Joshua. A last douse, and Gridley was set on his feet, half drowned, dripping, momentarily breathless. But his head was clear—too clear.

"It was this drunken rascal who started the whole affair," Cap'n Quincy was declaiming. Aye, talking about him! "An idle, shiftless wastrel, a disgrace to the town. Best cool his heat in jail for a few days."

"A shameful tumult and riot indeed," said the Concord minister, a man much respected. "For such toss-

pot passions jail is the only remedy, gentlemen. This young man was at the bottom of it, you say?"

"Aye, he was that! Gridley, the loafing rascal!" The constable shoved in, holding a bloody face. "And the devil was helping him! Breathing fire and brimstone he was too, plain to smell—"

With safe backing now, he rushed at Gridley and smacked home a stinging blow in the face. This broke the spell. Abner promptly knocked him headfirst into the horse-trough, and had a glimpse of Tressilis lying at one side, senseless, his stub-nosed man Haskins working over him with a dribble of maudlin tears and more maudlin speech.

"Get him, men!" shouted Cap'n Joshua. "Lay him by the heels! In to the stocks with him!"

Gridley dodged the nearest men, broke through the circling throng, and took to his heels. Jail! The stocks! These things flamed in his bewildered consciousness. They were all against him. Cap'n Quincy had sure enough made him an outcast now. Gone was every hope and ambition.

With a sob of mingled fury and despair he saw a dozen pursuers streaming out behind him, and made for the river road full tilt.

Upon a space of minutes, he had been uplifted to the skies and plunged anew into the depths. Had he waited there to argue the matter with his enemies, stocks and jail would have been realities. Lies, mass anger, crowd fury—and back of it all, Cap'n Joshua. Yes, he had had his one big moment, and it was gone now, and Betsy with it. He was a fugitive, to all intents.

"Be damned to them!" he panted hotly. Running made his head hurt; he had been badly battered in that melee. He wiped blood from his face on torn sleeve. He had outrun the enemy; however, he pushed on hurriedly for home, cursing the boots that hurt his feet. Far to the rear, dust was rising from the road. He knew what that meant. They were after him.

THIS was the side road to the farm, no more than a grassy track. Hard resolve shook him, steadied him. Be damned to them! He had lost his head again; with some excuse this time, to be sure. Where was Betsy in all this? He winced at the thought. Not even the memory of Zeke Candler's broken face was any consolation.

A dozen men came tramping sturdily, angrily up the road, armed with staves and belaying pins. The town constable headed them. Two or three were seamen from the schooner, others were local farmers or townsmen; a somewhat rowdy crowd of the type always ready for trouble.

They headed out of the road for the Gridley farm.



The constable nodded at it. "That's it. Now, you fellers mind what Cap'n Joshua says, and the selectmen! Don't make no trouble, so long's he gives it up. If he won't, we'll make him and fetch him back to boot."

There was a chorus of assent, couched in regretful tones. It seemed a shame to give up their victim, if he yielded; he was ripe for punishment, they were more than ripe for handing it out. The Gridleys always had been

too proud anyway, no better'n other folks, especially this ragamuffin ne'er-do-well who had thrown the village into tumult. About a full day in the stocks was what he needed.

"Hello!" exclaimed the constable as they reached the dilapidated gateway. "That's him, setting on the front steps! What's that he's got with him!"

"Looks like firearms," said somebody. "A couple rifles, aint it?"

"You boys stay back. This has got to be done orderly."

The constable went on a few steps, halted, and lifted his voice.

"Hey, Gridley! You hand over that there militia flag peaceful, and we won't bother ye none. Otherwise you got to go back and answer for oaths and tumult and fighting and so on."

"What's that?" rejoined Gridley. "You want the flag, you say?"

"Yep. Cap'n Joshua is goin' to be captain of the new militia, and he says hand it over and stay out o' town and you won't be punished."

"Oh! Well," Gridley replied, "stay where you are, till I get it."

He disappeared. The constable restrained his men, much to their indignation. There were dark mutters about serving Gridley in proper Injun style—firing the house and laying him by the heels or worse. Old stories

Abner met them as they closed in. Somehow he kept his feet, kept lashing out—

fired the blood; stories how the men of New England took care of the red menace, by surrounding the Injun towns, setting them ablaze, and killing everything that got out. That had been great sport, in the old days.

Gridley came out of the house. He carried the big square crimson banner, and a stone and a couple of nails. Reaching up, he nailed it above the door, then whipped around and caught up one of the loaded rifles.

"All right, you come right on and take it," he called. "And the first one past the gate gets a bullet. Back up, constable! I got two guns here—"

A yell of surprise and anger burst forth as his defiance was realized. There was a simultaneous surge forward. The rifle roared and spouted powder-smoke. The constable pitched forward on his face. In frantic consternation the group scattered and

took cover, as Abner Gridley reached for the other gun, a big brown musket. The smoke thinned and lifted; he was reloading the rifle now.

"Get off my property, you lawless skunks!" he shouted. "Go back and tell Cap'n Joshua the flag stays right here, and your whole durned militia company will have to come and fight if they want it!"

A storm of invective answered him. The men had scattered through the brush and trees, and were calling to one another now. A stone whizzed past Gridley, then another.

"Get him when he's unloaded!" rose a yell, repeated and passed on. That was prime backwoods strategy, of course; loading took time. More stones showered upon the front steps. Gridley let fly with the musket, which he had loaded with gravel and scraps of metal. Wild shouts made response as the missiles hurtled through the undergrowth.

The constable stirred, came to one arm, then rose. He was fumbling at his scalp, which had been furrowed by the bullet. Seeing the blood on his

hand, he uttered a yell and bolted. Gridley laughed—then groaned and collapsed. A stone the size of an egg had caught him between the eyes.

Yells of exultant ferocity, shrill as war-whoops, echoed. But Gridley came erect, and the rifle roared in blind defiance. The bullet went wild, and now they had him where they wanted him—unloaded.

They changed their minds about that. Dazed, eyes fogged with blood, unsteady on his feet, Abner Gridley met them as they closed in. He swung the clubbed rifle; the stock snapped off at the first blow. He swung the iron barrel in his right hand, and his iron hook was busy. Everything was a swirl of grappling, striking figures reeling back and forth. Somehow he kept his feet, kept lashing out—

Then, suddenly, it was ended. Voices rang out in stern anger, but the battling fury was gone. His opponents fell away, were slinking off; he wiped the blood from his eyes and blinked at the little group before him; three, all told. Two selectmen and the grave minister from Concord.

"So you're after the flag too, are you?" he panted.

The preacher stepped toward him. "No one is after your flag, Abner Gridley," he replied. "These misguided men have wrought a great injustice. Mr. Tressilis has not only told everyone the truth, but has forced Captain Quincy to admit it as well—and forced it, I may say, with heavy hand. We have come to end this scene of riot and bloodshed. When you have come to yourself, young man, return to town, and public reparation shall be made you. Thank heaven, no serious damage to life or limb has resulted—"

What else was said, Gridley did not know or care. His eyes were blinded and swelling, hurts and bruises throbbed, and even the thrill of unexpected triumph was dimmed by his fog of exhaustion. Heart hammering, he sank down the steps.

"Leave me alone—I'm all right!" he rejoined fiercely to proffers of aid. Their steps receded upon the afternoon. Alone, bloody face sunk on chest, he sighed and relaxed. Nobody killed; that was good.

THE warm sunlight was comforting. He drifted, dimly conscious again of steps and voices; he half-roused with inquiry, but no one answered. From above came a flap-flapping in the breeze, as the flag waved heavily.

"Smelled powder again, have you?" he murmured. "Battle of Gridley Farm—last time, I reckon, you'll ever wave in a fight, old flag! Hello—who is it? Who's here?"

He could see nothing but was aware of soft hands fluttering at him; and then he jumped, upon hearing Betsy's voice.

"Quiet, Abner dear—quiet, while I bathe your poor face. . . . Everything's all right now. It's all over. Mr. Tressilis brought me up here—"

"Tressilis!" Gridley sat up, then subsided as a wet cloth touched his face. "Where is he?"

"He went back to town. . . . Oh, Abner! Your eyes!"

His good arm went around her. "Eyes don't matter, I reckon. Well, I guess your pa aint going to get the flag after all."

"No, he's got other things to think about, Abner; the selectmen said you're to be made militia captain and keep the flag as long as you want, and if there's another war—"

His arm tightened, and he laughed. "Won't be any more wars, Betsy! I reckon we got more important matters to worry us than wars—"

He was wrong about that, as the world learned when shots rang out at Lexington, and the Bedford minutemen stood at Concord Bridge under their old crimson flag, sniffing battle-smoke once more.



The famous Pine Tree flag waves triumphant in the next story of this much-discussed historical series.

Australia Holiday



A saddle from back home in Texas brought about an exciting "buck-jumping" contest for the soldier guests.

by JAMES
FRANCIS DWYER

THE invitation to the American soldiers came from the daughter of the owner of Tambaroora Sheep and Cattle Station. It was addressed to Sergeant Matterson, who some days previously had come back to camp after a solitary promenade in the bush, and had reported an extraordinary happening. On a cattle track, miles away from a habitation, he had met a beautiful girl in distress. She had dismounted to arrange a girth that had slipped, and her horse had become so restless she was unable to mount without assistance.

Sergeant Matterson, so he stated, had gentled the horse and had given the young lady a hoist into the saddle. She had thanked him, asked his

name, and informed him that he would receive a note from her father.

No one believed the story till the invitation came. The Sergeant waved it triumphantly at all the doubters. It was on paper headed "Tambaroora Station; John Rothby, Proprietor," and it ran as follows:

Dear Sergeant Matterson:

Father is arranging a buck-jumping contest for next Tuesday. A number of the boys are back on furlough and we are trying to amuse them. There will be a number of fancy riders from neighboring stations—the Overflow, Irish Lords, Corambilla, Bogan Downs, etc.—and Father thinks that you boys might find the affair interesting.

We have read a lot about American rodeos and we would like your opinion on the buck-jumping capacities of our horses and the riding ability of our men.

We will send two or three station traps to bring you over. A luncheon will be served in the shearing-shed for all visitors. We hope to see quite a number of our American cousins.

With all good wishes,

Very sincerely yours,

Mary Rothby.

Sergeant Matterson was beside himself. The unimaginative who had jeered at his story of the meeting in the bush were confounded by the invitation. He read the note aloud; then he rushed through the mess hall shouting for Bandleys Magee.

"Bandy!" he screamed. "Where the devil are you, Bandy?"

Private Magee, known as "Bandy" because of a noticeable outward bend in his legs, was sitting in the shade of a mimosa bush bemoaning the lack of cavalry regiments in the modern army. "On a hoss is where I belong," he was informing two simple-minded

privates who sat near him. "A hoss to me is like wings to an angel. I'm longin' an' longin' for the smell of saddle leather."

"And you're goin' to get it!" yelled Sergeant Matterson, interrupting the talk. "We've been listenin' to you for weeks tellin' us that you were the champeen at every rodeo between Laramie an' the Texan border, an' now you're goin' to represent the regiment!"

"Goin' to what?" demanded Magee. "Represent the regiment!" cried Matterson. "You're goin' to meet all the champeen riders in this neck o' the woods an' you're goin' to make 'em crawl! An' we're goin' to pile our coin on you an' get theirs! Savvy?"

"Now, what's all this?" queried Bandy. "Talk hoss, boy. Talk hoss!"

"I'll talk," shouted Matterson. "The lovely daughter of the owner of Tambaroora Station, whom I had the pleasure of helpin' when she was in distress, an' about which you were one o' the leadin' disbelievers, has sent an invite for as many of us as can get away to see a buck-jumping contest at the station!"

Now a crowd had gathered around the excited Matterson. He lowered his voice and motioned his audience to come closer.

"I've got a plan," he said. "We've got here with us in Bandleys Magee the greatest rider o' buck-jumpers that has ever come out o' the good old U.S.A. He's told us that till our ears ached. Now these Aussies are gamblers an' they've got the tin. Let's take 'em down with Magee. We'll make a pool an' back Bandy against the best o' them. What say?"

The idea was received with delight. The crowd clustered around Magee. He had annoyed many by his continuous bragging of his prowess as a rider, but now that a chance opened up for using that ability as a means of acquiring money they were flattering him.

"Good old Bandy!" they shouted. "You'll ride 'em into the ground, Bandy. You'll show 'em!"

Matterson, finding that the crowd approved of his plan, started to collect money for the pool. It came readily from all the men except one. The stand-out was a long lean lad from Texas named Hank Lannigan. A silent chap who had always listened to the bragging of Bandleys Magee with a faint trace of a smile on his sun-tanned face.

When Matterson approached him he shook his head.

"Why 'not'?" queried the Sergeant. "'Cause he can't ride," drawled the Texan.

"He says he can. Says he's ridden at Cheyenne an' Pendleton."

"He couldn't ride a wooden hoss in a merry-go-round," said the recalci-

trant. He considered his statement and added: "Not unless the boss o' the show held him on."

Bandy Magee was on his feet now. "I've watched you grinnin' when I've been talkin', Lannigan!" he shouted. "I'll ride any hoss that ever was foaled!"

"When they was little an' didn't know any meanness," said the Texan. "Sure. But a real grown-up hoss that had turned bad would toss you so high that the Angel Gabriel could chin to you without a megaphone. I'm not goin' to put any coin in a pool to back you."

The crowd separated the pair. Bandleys Magee had suddenly become a possible money-earner and they didn't wish him to get hurt.

FOUR light wagons turned up early on Tuesday morning to take the American soldiers to Tambaroora Station. Some twenty men under the leadership of Sergeant Matterson climbed aboard. The talkative drivers of the vehicles informed the Americans that riders from the neighboring stations had been arriving since day-break.

"Any of you fellers fancy riders?" they inquired.

"Well, not exactly," said Sergeant Matterson. "We're just plain infantrymen, an' the only leather we know is in our shoes." He winked at Bandy Magee as he spoke.

"You'll have a chance to see what Austrilyen riders can do," said one of the drivers. "There'll be a bunch o' chaps at Tambaroora that can stick to anything! One o' 'em, named Jack Wilson, sat a buckin' horse for two days without gettin' off."

"Without eatin'?" asked a private.

"No sir, they fed him," answered the Aussie. "Threw chunks o' boiled pumpkin at him. Bits o' it got hooked in his beard, an' he sucked it into his mouth. Oh, you'll see some fancy ridin' at old Tam!"

The Americans asked no further questions. They recognized a master raconteur when they met one. . . .

Tambaroora Station was not a large outfit. It was a bare ten thousand acres. It ran sheep on the parched plains and horses and longhorns in the rough wooded country. The homestead was a big rambling house of weatherboard with deep verandas

and a roof of galvanized iron. Stretching far to the rear of the main house were stockmen's quarters, shearing-sheds, dipping pits and yards.

Around the homestead when the Americans arrived were vehicles of every description. Dust-coated automobiles that had left the United States years before the declaration of war, buggies of all makes, light carts, and a few bullock-wagons with improvised seats that had brought whole families to see the show. Tied to the rails of the yards were some sixty horses that had brought stockmen, shearers and roustabouts from the neighboring stations. American and Australian flags flew side by side from saplings in front of the homestead.

The opening of the contests had been delayed for the arrival of the American soldiers. John Rothby wouldn't allow a single horse to be run into the chute till his guests had arrived. "I've got the show up specially for them," he said to the men who urged speed. "I want them to see what Austrilyen cars can do with horses."

A loud cheer greeted the Americans. Rothby led the applause. Big Australian hats were waved madly, and five score tough-looking men unloosed welcoming "Hurrahs" and "Coo-ees" as the soldiers were led to reserved places on the rails of the stockyard.

Mary Rothby, very charming in slacks and a red jumper, shook the hand of each U.S. soldier as they filed by her. All agreed that Sergeant Matterson had underrated her beauty when he came back to his disbelieving company on the day he had met her on the bush track. Matterson himself thought so as she straddled the rails beside him.

"All seated?" she inquired. Receiving an affirmative "Yep" from her visitors, she signaled to her father.

"Run Dingo into the chute!" shouted Rothby; then with a megaphone he addressed the crowd. "Paddy Morrison from Corambilla is going to take a shot at Dingo. If Paddy sticks for three minutes, he gets a bang-up bridle and a pair of spurs. If he doesn't, he gets a latherin' from his old woman, who's watching from one of the bullock-wagons."

A mean-looking mouse-colored horse was rushed into the chute, and he immediately proclaimed his dislike for his surroundings. He gave evidence of a kind of horse claustrophobia in his tightened quarters. He squealed violently and made an effort to climb the high fence.

Sergeant Matterson leaned forward to study the face of Bandy Magee. Bandy looked fearfully interested as Dingo was being saddled. He grasped the rails and stretched his neck to take in the proceedings.

Matterson's gaze shifted to the sun-tanned features of the Texan, Hank



Lannigan. The Texan was watching Magee, the same thin smile on his face that was noticeable each time he listened to Magee's stories of his riding exploits. Sergeant Matterson was a trifle puzzled about Lannigan.

The Dingo squealed louder. He lunged at everyone who came near. His ugly head had a strange serpentine appearance as he expressed his contempt for all mankind.

Paddy Morrison was lifted into the saddle. His big hands gripped the leather "monkeys" on the sides of the pommel. He nodded to Rothby. The door of the chute was flung wide.

The Dingo hurled himself through the opening. He became a fiend. He tore up the deep dust of the stockyard so that he and his rider at times were invisible. Men shouted and swore. At moments they believed the horse had shed Paddy Morrison; then they raised yells of delight as they saw the long rider still clinging manfully to the saddle-straps.

THE Dingo took four mad bucks across the yard. He came directly under the spot where Sergeant Matterson sat with Mary Rothby. The excited girl leaned forward dangerously to watch the combat and Matterson put out a hand to steady her. To his delight, she clung to his hand as she shouted encouragement to the rough-rider.

The Dingo now threw himself fully into the business of unseating Paddy. He turned his whole body into a steel catapult. Once, twice, three times he humped himself upward and the third movement did the trick. Paddy Morrison left the saddle, turned a pretty somersault in midair and landed on his ear in the dust.

Pickers-up were beside him in an instant. They dragged him through an opening in the lower rails, wiped the dust from his face, forced a drink of whisky into his mouth, felt his arms and legs and pushed him into a sitting position. They reported to Mary Rothby. "Nar, 'e's not 'urt," they chorused. "See 'ow 'e gobbled the whisky."

The Sergeant took another peek at Bandy Magee. Bandy was moistening his lips with his tongue. The Texan was watching Magee. Sergeant Matterson wondered about the Texan; he had stood out so resolutely against the pool.

Free, for the moment, from the influence of Mary Rothby, who had entered into a conversation with a neighboring squatter, the Sergeant thought of the money he had collected to back Magee. He thrust his hand into his trousers pocket and touched the wad of pound notes and silver pieces. It amounted to twenty-seven pounds nine shillings and sixpence, about ninety dollars in U.S.

currency. He wondered when the moment would come to lay down the money, but the atmosphere of the stockyard gave him hope.

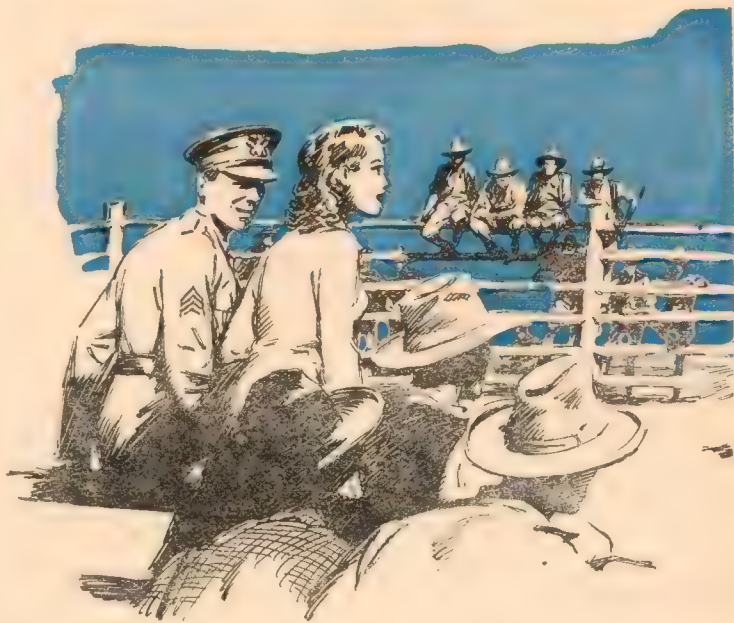
Dust, smell of horse, of sweat, of saddle-leather hung over the place of combat. Men straightened themselves in the interval following Paddy Morrison's attempt to master Dingo. Paddy climbed slowly onto the rails, snapping out negatives to inquiries as to his injuries.

"A mean hoss, Paddy," shouted a friend on the other side of the yard.

eye was meaningful. It promised homicide in the quickest possible manner. It looked as if someone had done dirt to Fair Dinkum when he was a little bit of a foal and he had been trying to even up the insult during his growing years.

Jimmy Beatty was lifted into the saddle. He took a grip on the straps, straightened his legs to the full length of the stirrup leathers and nodded.

Fair Dinkum went through the door of the chute with a mad plunge that carried him to the center of the



"He aint a mean hoss!" cried the indignant Morrison. "He's a good honest hoss!"

"Sure. He loved you!" retorted the friend. "Tried to bite yer ear off jest afore he tossed you."

"He wouldn't bite yore ear," screamed Morrison. "He'd know it would give him colic."

Roars of laughter and rough comment. The Americans enjoyed it.

Rothby climbed back to his place on the rails. He held up a hand for silence, and laughter and talk ceased.

"Jimmy Beatty wants to ride Fair Dinkum," announced Rothby. "He gets a pound for every minute he stays on his back."

"Hooray!" yelled the crowd. "Hooray for Jimmy. Bet he'll earn three shillings and sixpence on the ride."

The sneer annoyed Jimmy Beatty. He delayed his performance for a minute in an attempt to find the one who had made the sarcastic comment.

Fair Dinkum was a black horse with the heart of a Nazi murderer. His

yard. Head down, he started to describe circles with a speed that made the watchers giddy. A dozen whirls to the left, a dozen to the right. Hard jarring slams to the ground each time he struck it, with Jimmy Beatty clinging to the grips trying to earn the pound a minute by sheer courage and endurance.

But Fair Dinkum had no desire to let Jimmy get rich at his expense. He stopped in a wild spin, upended himself on his hind legs and fell backward. Beatty managed to roll clear.

"One minute and thirty seconds!" shouted Rothby. "Jimmy gets thirty bob for the ride."

Jimmy crawled out of the yard and caused a diversion by loudly challenging the man who had called out the insulting remark to come behind the shearing-shed. "I'll give him three shillings an' sixpence!" he shouted. "I'll knock his head off!"

Buck-jumper followed buck-jumper. Rider followed rider. A roan horse called Blazes created a sensa-

tion. An aboriginal named Tommy Bluegum attempted to ride him, but when Blazes sprang into the yard, he turned his long snaky head and seized the flying shirt of the aboriginal. Tommy Bluegum released a hand to smash the horse in the mouth but Blazes clung to the shirt. The flimsy covering split up the back, flew

There was a short interval after the Blazes ride. Men climbed down from the rails and walked over to the section occupied by the American soldiers. They asked questions in a bashful manner. Were the soldiers enjoying the sport? What was their opinion concerning the Australian riders? Did they think them the equal

would be backed up. All eyes were turned on Matterson.

"Well, now, that might be proved if there was any American here who wished to ride," said the loud-spoken youngster. "An' we might have a friendly bet about it," he added with a grin.

Matterson and his men looked at Bandy Magee. The Australians took the hint and followed their gaze. Bandy was thrust into prominence by the combined stares. He cleared his throat and spoke.

"I'd ride against anyone here if I had an American saddle," he said. "These saddles o' yours don't give a rider who isn't used to them a chance."

"So," said the assertive Australian youth; then, turning to the homestead where Rothby was smoking quietly on the shady veranda, he shouted a query: "Hi, John, didn't you have a fancy Yank saddle that you bought from a busted circus down in Sydney?"

"That's right," answered Rothby.

"Where is it now?"

"I don't know," said Rothby. "No one would ride in it, and I— Hold on! You'll find it in a corner of the harness-room wrapped up in some chaff bags."

Excitement seized the men who surrounded the American soldiers. Half a dozen rushed to the harness-room, urged on by the shouts of their friends.

The Australians stared at Bandy Magee. There was upon their suntanned faces a look of sweet maliciousness. They reasoned that the American had foolishly committed himself, never thinking that there was an American-made saddle within three hundred miles of Tambora Station. The unexpected had happened. Into what was to them an ordinary day of rough sport had come a surprising element. An American would ride if he had an American saddle!—and John Rothby had such a saddle!

IN triumph three men carried the saddle to the rails of the stockyard. They tipped it out of the chaff bags onto the dusty ground. Its appearance brought cries and grunts of astonishment from many of the Australians who had not seen an American saddle; to the soldiers it brought a fierce nostalgia as they regarded it in silence.

A genuine Western saddle—made with a certain extravagance. Overdecorated and overembellished, it was, but all there. It lay on the parched ground, and the hot sun struck fire from its silver adornments. A saddle that might have been the pride of its owner, that might have seen a hundred Frontier Day celebrations, scores of rodeos and reunions. So typically American it brought a tightening of the throat to a few of the soldiers.

All eyes were now on Bandy Magee. Gayly malicious were the eyes of the



"Let down the rails!" shouted Lannigan.

out in the breeze and settled on the head of the horse, making the animal into an equine Ku-Klux clansman, to the great delight of the Americans.

Blazes crashed against the rails, rebounded, carried Bluegum to the other side of the yard and tried to climb over the rails. The rider's black face became pale with fear. He couldn't see the head of the horse, still covered by the shirt, and that fact brought terror to him. As Blazes started again across the yard he prepared himself for a jump. Loosening his grip on the leathers, he hurled himself at the rails as the horse canoned into them. Hands grabbed him and he was hauled to safety.

"He plurry debbill!" he hissed when he got his breath. "He plurry bad horse. Snatchem good shirt."

Mary Rothby gave orders that Tommy Bluegum should go to the station store and choose a cotton shirt from the stock. Rothby gave him five shillings for the ride, and the black grinned with delight as he walked off.

of American horsemen?

Sergeant Matterson fingered the wad in his trousers pocket. He felt that the brag and chatter going on all around him would produce the moment he waited for.

The name of Buffalo Bill came into the wild jabber. Some of the older men had seen Buffalo Bill when he came to Australia with his Wild West Show. They talked of riders who had come with the Sells Brothers combination and other American circuses. Opinions were expressed loudly.

"I think our riders can beat any Yankee riders in a fair set-to," asserted a lean youngster in a loud voice.

The moment had arrived. The wad in his pocket cried out to Sergeant Matterson. It forced the words from his lips.

"I don't think so," he said quietly. "I don't believe that any Australian rider could whip an American in a competition."

His words brought a silence. There was in them a suggestion that they



"One minute five seconds," announced Rothby, as Bandy went into the dust.

natives. There was the saddle he craved. They had brought it to him. Why shouldn't he step out from the circle and inspect it?

Sergeant Matterson gave Magee a push. Bandy stepped close to the saddle. He punched the stuffing, he tested the stirrup leathers, the stirrups; rubbed his hands over the seat and cantle. He could find nothing wrong.

"Well," said the lean youngster, the glitter of a gambler in his eye, "how about a bet? Pick a horse against me. Chap who stays on longest wins. How about a fiver bet?"

"You're on," said Sergeant Matterson.

"Rothby will hold the money," said the Australian. "Come over here, John," he shouted to the station-owner, "we're going to stage a show. International but friendly."

John Rothby came over to the group. He was very serious. The Americans were his guests for the day and he didn't wish anything to be pulled on them. He listened to the statement put forward by the Australian and he stared at Bandy Magee.

"I don't like it altogether," he said slowly. "Might be unfair."

"It's all right as far as we are concerned," rejoined Sergeant Matterson. "We're content to bet. Anyone want

to gamble? I've got a lot more coin to lose."

The Texan, Hank Lannigan, pushed his way to Matterson's side and whispered: "Don't bet any more! You'll lose!"

"Go away!" snapped Matterson. "It's not your money I'm chancing." To the crowd he cried: "Even money our man wins!"

The momentary stupor produced by challenge and acceptance was swept away. The lean youngster was the son of the proprietor of Irish Lords, a neighboring cattle-station. His name was Jack Dawson and he had a great reputation as a fearless rider. Now his friends saw an opportunity to pick up money. The Americans seemed confident, although John Rothby had warned them, so there was no crime in supporting their man. They rushed Sergeant Matterson. Inside five minutes the wad of the American soldiers had been laid at even money and the coin was in the hands of John Rothby.

NOW the atmosphere was charged with excitement. The news of the bets went out to the buggies and the bullock-wagons where middle-aged women, not interested in the riding exhibition, sat with their youngsters

in the shade. It spread to the blacks in their camp in the gully, bringing a dozen barefooted *gins*—married women of a certain age—and *lubras*, young women who had not contracted marriage—walking fearfully toward the stockyard.

Bandy Magee was escorted to the homestead. He was given a change and came out into the sunlight in riding breeches and boots. He had asked for gloves, a possession unknown to the Australian rider, and a pair of gauntlets had been hunted up and given to him.

Mary Rothby questioned Sergeant Matterson. "Have you seen him ride?" she asked.

"No, but I've heard him talk," grinned Matterson.

"Then why back him?"

"Well," said the Sergeant, "if he loses, we won't have to listen to his talk any more; and if we win, we'll get the money, so it's a good bet any way you look at it."

Bandy Magee chose a horse called Firecracker, a roan with a seemingly friendly expression. Dawson picked a mare that had been brought from the Riverina country and carried the name of Lily Langtry. The two contestants tossed a coin to see who would

Lesson -

open the ball. Magee won the toss and sent Dawson to the chute. Bandy would have a gauge by the other's performance.

Lily Langtry was wrongly named. No Jersey Lily was the mare. She was a thousand pounds of she-wolf and rattlesnake. She possessed a thousand tricks for shattering fool riders and she ran them out fast. She twisted like a destroyer dodging a torpedo. She hoisted herself on stiff legs and landed with the crash of a half-ton bomb. She squealed like a lost soul.

Dawson could ride. He clung to her for a full two minutes; then the mare thought it time to unseat him. She did a pirouette on her hind legs, dropped with a frightful jerk and, with a clever side leap, sent the rider flying.

John Rothby called the time. "Two minutes and nine seconds!" he announced. "Two ten will win for the United States."

BANDY MAGEE looked pale as they hoisted him onto the back of Firecracker. The roan seemed peaceable and friendly. The American boys were hopeful, except the long Texan, Hank Lannigan.

"He's scared," whispered Lannigan. "Shut up!" snapped Matterson. "What is it to you anyway? You've got no coin on the event?"

"I've got the honor of my country," drawled the Texan. "I jest hate to see anyone fool with it."

Matterson opened his mouth to deliver a biting retort, but at that moment the door of the chute was flung open and Firecracker hurled himself into the yard. His seeming friendliness was a blind for outright devilry. He pig-jumped around the dusty arena, then imitated the Russian bear by parading on his hind legs in a goose-stepping fashion. Bandy looked like a monkey on a pole. Firecracker took a sidelong glance at him, thrust his ugly head against the face of Magee and hammered his nose with a long jawbone. Bandy pulled his head back to escape punishment; Firecracker seized the moment, dropped and did a giddy whirl that would have won fame for a toe dancer. Bandy went into the dust. Three pickers-up dragged him to safety as the horse tried to savage him.

"One minute and five seconds," announced Rothby. "Jack Dawson is the winner."

Sergeant Matterson glared at the Texan. "If you say I-told-you-so, I'll flatten you," he hissed. "I've had enough of you to last me a lifetime. I'm sorry I brought you!"

"You won't be when we're going home," said the Texan.

John Rothby called a halt for lunch after the Dawson-Magee combat. The

Americans wondered at the silence that followed the defeat of Bandy. No one cheered or waved. Instead there was a look of near sadness on the face of the Aussies as they filed toward the shearing-shed where the luncheon was laid out.

The matter was explained as the men were seated. John Rothby rose, struck a cow-bell for attention and commenced to speak. Looking toward the group of Americans who were seated at the head of the table he said: "You men, who are our guests today, have been called our blood brothers by your great commander, General Douglas MacArthur, and I hope we will always be blood brothers. Jack Dawson, who won the riding contest against Soldier Magee, has spoken to me. He says that it would be dishonorable for us to have you here as our guests and then take your money. Dawson proposes to call all bets off, and in that he has the hearty approval of all the others who wagered on the event. Therefore I wish to hand back the stakes I received from Sergeant Matterson and—"

The Sergeant was on his feet. "No, no!" he cried. "We thank you for your gesture, but our acceptance of your offer would put us in the position of schoolboys. We backed Magee to win, and if he had won, we would have taken your pound notes with a grin. The matter is finished as far as we are concerned, and I hope Mr. Dawson will live to ride a thousand mares as active as Lily Langtry."

The tables cheered the Sergeant. The visible sadness of the Australians was swept away and the matter of consuming food and drink became the one thought of all.

A bullock had been slaughtered and roasted for the occasion. Loads of vegetables and monster melons had been brought from the station garden; the orchard, famous throughout the countryside, had supplied the fruit, and liquids ran in streams.

John Rothby rose at the end of the main courses and proposed the health of the President of the United States. It was drunk with great enthusiasm. Sergeant Matterson responded.

General MacArthur's health was coupled with that of the American Army, and the cheers and yells that accompanied the toast disturbed the peaceful sheep way out on the sun-parched plain. Australia and the Australians was proposed by Matterson and drunk with much handshaking as Aussies left their seats and wandered around to the section occupied by the Americans.

When the tumult had settled, and pipes, cigars and cigarettes had been lighted, Hank Lannigan, the long Texan, who had refused to bet on Bandy Magee, rose from his place and begged Rothby's permission to speak.

Lannigan had drunk nothing but water during the meal, and was quite cool and collected.

"A speaker has suggested that the American saddle used by Magee has been so long in Australia that it has lost its Americanism and hasn't acted in a patriotic manner toward its countryman," he began. "I doubt that. That saddle was so American that it nearly choked me when I saw it. It just whisked me away from your country an' landed me back home. I had a tear in my eye when I saw it tipped out the bag. Why, it was part o' me. It was part o' Texas where I hail from. It was home."

He paused and looked around the long tables. The Americans stared at him with wide eyes. They had never heard him talk at such length.

"Yes, that saddle upset me," he continued. "Sort o' made my stomach turn over. You see, I've been a cowboy back home, and I might have met that saddle somewhere. Might have known the boy who owned it. See? Now you might be gettin' at what is bitin' me; at what has pushed me on my hind-legs to talk. You men are good gamblers. Fellows who are willing to give back what you've won because we are your guests. Now I'm going to propose a bet that will be right down your street. I wouldn't have done it if it wasn't for that American saddle. I can't let it down. I won't let it down! . . . It's Texas. It's home. It's me!"

"Well, men, this is my proposition. You can pick any pair of your outlaw horses, the worst you can find, an' I'll ride 'em in the yard, take 'em out o' the yard, gallop 'em a little round the country and bring 'em back as tame as kittens."

He paused and put his hand in his pocket. He pulled it out, claspings a sheaf of bills. "Here's fifty pounds," he cried. "I'll bet the whole caboodle on the American saddle! Any two buck-jumpers ridden and gentled in a reasonable time. Who's betting? No sentimental stuff. I pocket the stuff if I win; you take it if I lose. Come on, men!"

TAMBAROORA STATION will never know an afternoon like that on which Hank Lannigan made his bet. The Australians held back for a little while, thinking the proposal ridiculous, but Lannigan's urging made them wager that the feat was impossible.

Yet the confidence of the Texan startled them after the bets were made. There was something about the speech and manner of the tall American that made them think he might accomplish what he had set himself to do. That he was a horseman they knew by the manner in which he eyed the two buck-jumpers that were finally chosen by a committee of four.

One was a "brumby" stallion who had killed two men within the previous six months. He had thrown both and had beaten the life out of them with his hoofs before they had time to crawl to shelter. His name was rightly Lucifer.

The second was a piebald mare with strange markings. There was a legend about the mare. She had been found alone in the Never-Never country a hundred miles from a cattle station. She carried no brand and had never been claimed. Possibly her looks didn't invite claimants. She had a wall eye, a head like a prehistoric lizard, and a set of yellow fangs that would do credit to a Japanese admiral. She had savaged a half dozen men who had tried to handle her, tearing the left arm off one and biting a piece from the cheek of another. She had been christened the She Devil.

Lannigan caused a general laugh when he announced his reason for selecting She Devil for his first ride. "I like to take the hardest hoss first," he drawled. "Especially if it is a female. Gallantry is strong down in Texas."

SO they put the American saddle on She Devil, after Lannigan had stroked it in a loving fashion. Sergeant Matterson and his buddies stood around in silent wonder. None had ever heard the Texan brag of his riding ability. He wouldn't bet on Magee because he guessed that Magee couldn't ride, but he hadn't offered himself as a substitute. And now he proposed to do something the crowd of horsemen thought impossible.

Lannigan was hoisted into the saddle. He settled himself coolly, grinned at the spectators and nodded his head to Rothby. She Devil went through the gate like a streak of lightning.

That mare immediately showed that she had been suckled on snake-poison hepped up with ground glass. Her squeals were blood-curdling. They were piercing, prolonged and hate-filled. They terrified the aboriginal women who had crept up close to the stockyard. The *gins* seized their pickaninnies and fled back to the camp.

And She Devil backed her squeals with action. She was a she-wolf of a horse. She had all the bottled wickedness of horses since the days of the little *eehippus*. She had three hundred different kinds of known bucks and fifty that had never been seen before. She played them all. The watchers on the rails looked on in awe.

Lannigan clung to her. Reefed her when she slowed down. Fanned her when she paused for an instant to see if he was still on her back.

"Let down the rails!" he shouted when the mare had her stern to the opening.

Astonished, fearful of what might happen to the Texan, the hands

turned to Rothby. The station-owner nodded. Rothby knew a great rider when he saw one. The rails were thrown down.

Lannigan struck the mare with his hat. She turned, saw the open slip-rails and went through them at a bound. A dust-cloud formed on the plain, a dust-cloud in the center of which were Lannigan and She Devil.

"After him!" shouted Rothby. "Ride like the devil. She might kill him!"

Two score riders rushed toward their mounts. There was a mad mounting of shouting men. Spurs and whips were brought into play. A line of pursuers stretched out across the plain in pursuit of the dust-cloud.

Past the big mimosa clump, past the long *billabong*—a quiet stretch of water shunned by the blacks who thought it the home of the *bunyip*—past Kangaroo Hill and Bandicoot Hollow went the dust-cloud and the wild riders who tried to overtake it.

Lannigan and She Devil swung westward, and the sweating pursuers swore mightily as they rode. The Texan was riding straight for the Gilya Swamp, a great mud-covered patch that blossomed into a lake in the rainy season. Now it was a bog that trapped foolish beasts that wandered into it in search of water.

She Devil splashed into the great mud-cakes on the edge of the swamp. Half blinded by dust, Lannigan realized his danger. He wrenched the head of the mare around as she floundered. She slipped and fell. With superhuman force he dragged her to her feet and turned her shoreward. The frenzied mare was content to meet death if she could take with her the rider who clung to her back in spite of all her efforts.

The pursuers were up with Lannigan as he reached solid ground. The Texan turned the mare for the homestead, and the escort rode with him. Silently they watched him handle the mare. She Devil, covered with mud and foam, was a wreck.

Lannigan spurred her to the veranda of the homestead and dismounted. Head down, her sides heaving, lacking the last atom of fight, She Devil gave proof that she had met her master.

The crowd was silent. They stared at the long Texan and the mare. She Devil was a wash-out.

John Rothby had a whispered talk with Jack Dawson and a few others who had taken up Lannigan's challenge. When the Texan called for the "brumby" stallion the station-owner spoke.

"We have talked it over, and we think you've done enough to win your bet," he said. "We've had the pleasure of seeing the finest bit of riding that has ever been seen in these parts,

and we don't want further proof that you're a kingpin horseman. We think that—"

"But I want to win the bet I made," interrupted Lannigan. "I want to ride the stallion."

"You've won the bet," said Rothby. "Everyone is contented. It's too darned hot for another gallop like the one you've just done, and besides, I'm not going to put an American soldier in danger after he has proved himself a topnotch rider. I declare this buck-jumping contest over. Let's go back to the shearing-shed."

Hank Lannigan had the seat of honor beside Mary Rothby. The Texan thought her marvelous. He confided his secret to her. He was sweet on a girl in San Antone but he lacked the courage to ask her hand.

"If I were you," whispered Mary, "I would find a horse as bad as the one you have just ridden, take it up near that girl's house and give an exhibition like the one you gave us. I'm sure she'd fall for you quick."

Lannigan considered the suggestion. "I'll try it when I get back," he said. "It's a pretty good idea."

Mary Rothby whispered to her father. Rothby smiled and gave an order. The American saddle was carried into the shed and placed on the table.

"Friends," said Rothby, "someone said this saddle might have lost its patriotism, but Private Lannigan has proved it hasn't. I now present it to the soldier rider with our best wishes."

There were more toasts. More speeches telling of the great friendship that existed between Americans and Australians. There were recitations by stockmen. Ballads: "The Man from Snowy River," "Jack MacPherson's Dream," "How the Firequen Crossed the Swamp" and many others.

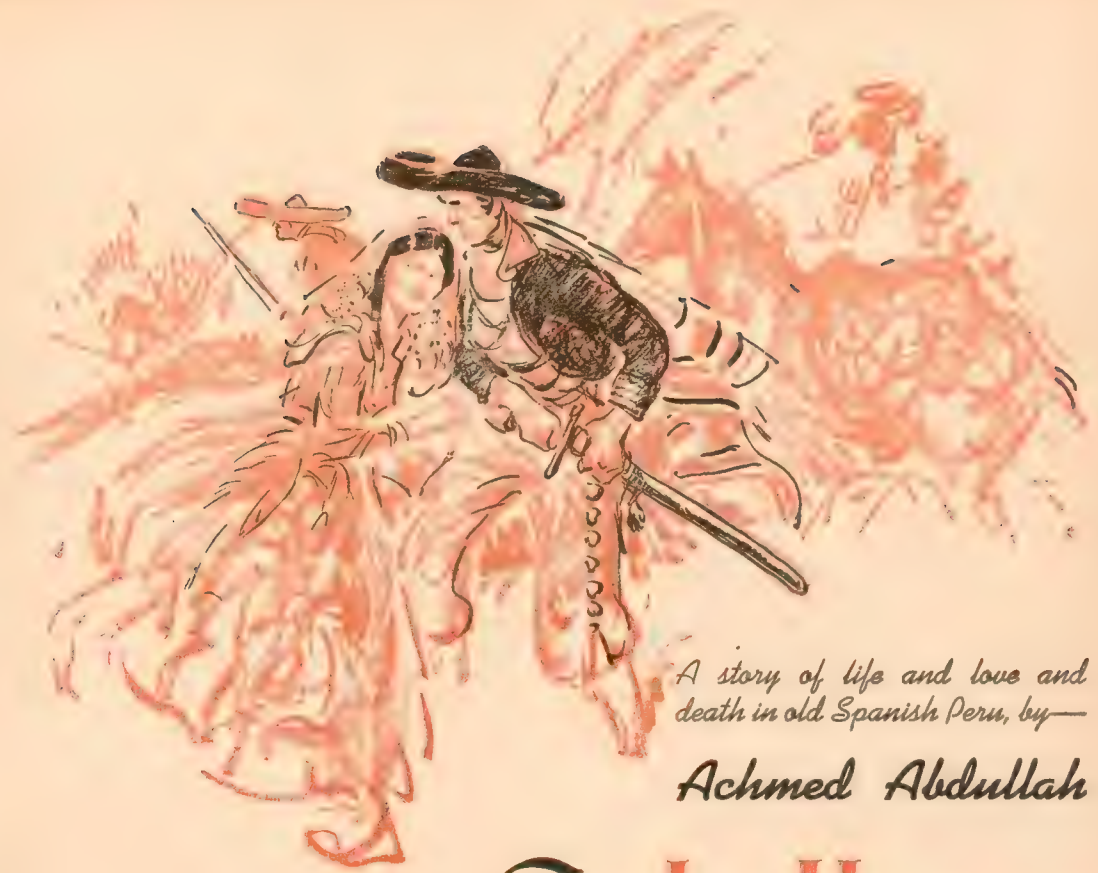
AS the night closed in, the whole crowd rose and sang "Fellers of Australier." The words went out into the silent night:

*Fellers of Australier,
Cobbers, chaps an' mates,
Hear the bloomin' enemy
Kickin' at the gates!
Blow the bloomin' bugle,
Beat the bloomin' drum,
Uppercut and out the cow
To kingdom bloomin' come.*

Again the American boys lined up and said farewell to Mary Rothby. She leaned forward and whispered in the ear of Hank Lannigan.

"I will," said the Texan, "and I'll write an' let you know."

Sergeant Matterson called for three cheers for Tambaroora Station, and its owner as the vehicles pulled out into the darkness. Tambaroora and its guests responded. It had been a wonderful day.



*A story of life and love and
death in old Spanish Peru, by—*

Achmed Abdullah

Caballeros

IF you describe Esteban Garcia, you describe Pedro Carvallo. They were tall men both, brisk and hearty, a bit hard in the look, a bit braggart, with storm-gray eyes that never narrowed at the sight of danger; and they were friends closer than brothers—just as their fathers, who had come to Peru with Pizarro to conquer the country for His Most Catholic Majesty the King of Spain, had been friends.

They were young. They were reckless; and on that day when they decided to take the far road, the wild road, their mothers sighed, and said:

"Why carry ever naked steel on hip? Marry! Settle down! There's plenty silver to be made here in Lima—maybe in a shipchandler's shop, with all the great galleons coming and going."

"Why be satisfied with silver," they replied, "when there's gold beyond the Andes for the taking?"

"And the fighting! There is peace in Lima."

"Would we listen to the dull, fat drone of peace, when we can listen to the rich song of strife?"

So they left town. For several months, stirrup to stirrup, they roamed the wide plains on the other side of the mountains. Crossing bright weapons with weapons of their own; galloping from ambush with enough noise to make believe they were a dozen instead of merely the tough pair of them; robbing princely Incas and simple Indian peasants; filling their saddlebags and their loose breeches with plunder; negligent of the fact that, here and there, they left behind them widow-women weeping because their men were below the sod.

But that's how it was with them, they being what they were. And, being what they were, they were well content—riding along, with Esteban,

one day, slapping his pocket so that the jewels and gold clinked and clanked, as he exclaimed:

"Gold is the boy in Lima!"

"Gold is the boy," agreed his friend, "and buys the girls. The pretty girls—the soft girls—the red-haired ones."

"Some wheat-haired ones, too, have slender scarlet mouths for a strong lad's kissing."

So they jested; were presently silent. For, with words of *Lima* and *home*, came longing for Lima and home—longing that grew as, hour after hour, the plains rolled on, changing, by late afternoon, to a desert—an ocean of sand, charging, leaping, flinging forward as if to overwhelm and drown those who dared tread its grim solitude.

"I remember Lima," said Pedro. "I remember a garden there, and a pool in the garden like a piece of the blue sky tumbled among the flowers."



"I remember the grand red wine at Salvador Quintana's tavern."

"I remember the suppers my mother used to cook. Slabs of white bread and no lack of onion soup, and a mutton stew fit to tickle the Pope's palate."

"Why not home for the two of us?"

"Why not indeed?"

THEY spurred their mares. They rode hard, grudging each hour of rest, until they came within sight of the Andes.

Esteban pointed at the far, blurred welter of peaks.

"Look!" he said. "Are they not like tall proud Spanish ladies?"

"Indeed!" agreed the other. "Bidding us welcome home!"

Night had fallen. They hobbled their horses and made camp.

"Home—within the week!" were Esteban's last words, before they dozed.

For hours they slept soundly; were suddenly startled wide awake—not by the sun, which had already risen and was spinning like a golden ball through the endless fields of space, but by a tickle of steel at their throats, and a rough voice, with a harsh Northern accent, giving sardonic advice:

"Be careful how you move!"

Cautiously they looked up. They saw, standing above them, half a

*Esteban, slapping his pocket so jewels and gold clinked, exclaimed:
"Gold is the boy in Lima!"*

dozen men, Englishmen judging by their ruddy faces and blue eyes. For Esteban and Pedro were not the only bandits hereabouts. Occasionally English pirates landed at small Peruvian ports to trek overland and find what they might find. And so, though the two Spaniards blustered and threatened, impotently, helplessly, they were relieved of every last bit of the loot they had gathered in the past months—relieved, also, of their weapons and horses.

Only their sack of provisions and leathern water-bag the Englishmen left them; then rode away. And was it not like Esteban and Pedro that here, in the hour of defeat, they should jest as in the hour of triumph?

"Back to our home like birds in spring!" said Esteban.

"Have you ever seen two birds more soundly plucked?" asked the other. "Birds without wings! Birds that will have to take their shanks to it!"

So they kept on west, toward the Andes and, beyond, the coastal land—and Lima. Weary, dutsy, hot, they slogged steadily along; and the tow-

ering peaks not seeming to come nearer; and ever the desert stretching brittle and endless and contemptuous.

Then a sand-storm came; and when it had passed, there was no trail left, no spoor. Nor was there tree nor water, bird nor beast—except once, far off, a scavenger wolf loping, swiftly, grayly, like an evil thought—and they grew conscious of a certain dull and throbbing apprehension. . . .

Evening dropped. There was, in the lee of a basalt rock, a meager tangle of growths: thyme and dwarf-acacia, plants not green, but ash-colored, stiff, sapless.

"The mountains—tomorrow!" mumbled Esteban.

"And home," mumbled the other, "within the week."

They slept fitfully; were off again in the cool of the morning. But the cool did not last long. Soon the sun rose, its rays crackling down like a rain of spears, while mile after mile they tramped—across a never-ending stretch of dun loam, scalped, flayed, covered with billows of sand which twisted and scudded to the fiery piping of the wind.

Esteban slipped the water-bag from his shoulder. He drank deeply—until Pedro snatched at his hand and cried:

"Leave a drop for me!"



"Gold is the boy," agreed Pedro. "And buys the girls." So they jested, riding along.

He too drank deeply. They stared at each other, then went on their way.

They thought of home, beyond the Andes. The lean, green land of rivers and trees—and Lima with its proud, stout houses, and their mothers there, their own folk, so kindly and dear. A blessed land! And this land here, the desert—accursed it was, not blessed. They hated it, hated it. . . . And then, suddenly, frighteningly, came the knowledge to both of them that it was not only the desert which they hated, but each other—yes, each other!

These many years they had been friends closer than brothers. Yet here, today, was this hate, tense, bitter, like an inky scrawl across their hearts. And ludicrously, tragically, they were blaming each other for everything—from the pain in their lungs to their aching leg muscles, from the stabbing heat to the monotony of the sand.

"It was your fault!" all at once exclaimed Pedro.

"My fault?"

"Your not watching—and giving those English heretics a chance to—"

"Why should I have been sentinel more than you? Was it not I who, throughout the months, did most of the work?"

"Liar!"

"Infidel Jew!"

They were about to exchange blows. Then, quickly, Esteban stepped back. He bowed with stiff Spanish courtesy.

"Forgive me!" he begged. "It was my fault."

"No, no! Mine! Mine entirely!"

They embraced, thick chest against thick chest. Yet deep within them, anger and enmity smoldered as they tramped along, scanning the sky-line—and still, in the distance, the hills mocking them; and everywhere the desert, futile, ironic, cracked with gap and rift, disintegrating in age-old, ageless decay and abandonment.

The wind shrilled, then ceased. Came silence—silence that gave the curious sensation as if here, in the flaming, clogged core of the wilderness, nature had stopped to breathe and was looking introspectively into her own soul—and Esteban laughed, loudly, unreasonably; and Pedro turned on him, yelling:

"Be quiet!"

Again they were ready to leap at each other. Again they mumbled apologies and went on their way—on and on, carelessly eating their scant provisions and taking long drinks from their water-bag.

On the fourth day they passed a rock which they recalled having seen on the second day. On the fifth day they knew that they were lost. On the sixth day they drank their last drop of water and ate their last morsel of food.

Often they stumbled, at times fell. Their feet were raw, their lips black and cracked. For all this Pedro blamed Esteban, and Esteban blamed Pedro. But they did not speak of it, for speaking meant an effort, and they were too weak.

On the ninth day they found a shallow water-hole. They fought over it, weakly yet wickedly, because each wanted to survive.

ESTEBAN it was who bore the brunt of the battle. His foot slipped and he fell; at once Pedro was upon him, striking him, kicking him, with all his strength, in the face, the chest, the groin. He was drunk with rage. His hands gripped the other's throat, squeezing like a vise. . . . And then, suddenly, looking down at the battered features, he said to himself, almost wonderingly:

"Why—this is Esteban Garcia—my friend!"

He knelt beside the other, and carressed him. He wept like a child—and it was Esteban who, regaining consciousness, sat up and whispered:

"Do not cry, Pedro. It was not you who did this thing. It was the desert. The madness of the desert." He smiled. "Friends—you and I!"

"Friends—always!"

"No man can ever come between us!"

"Nor ever a woman!"

And they found this woman on that same day.

Afternoon had brought a haze of pink and lavender, and a stretch of desert, no longer flat, presently descending to a cup-shaped hollow.

Esteban was in the lead. He climbed to the rim of the hollow; and all at once, joy surged through him as he saw, a short distance away, the desert cut off as sharp as with a knife; saw patches of grass, tall, wavering, emerald-green; saw, just beyond, the edge of a dense forest.

The forest—why, it meant water. It meant food. It meant life.

"Hurry!" he called to Pedro over his shoulder.

He ran. His feet trod the grass. He laughed.

Then, a second later, he was silent. For, quite near, he heard a voice.

"Help—please!"

Something moved in the grass. He bent—and saw a girl, young, pretty. A Spanish girl, no doubt. Her dress was in rags; she was bruised and bleeding; her right ankle was terribly swollen, so that she was not able to walk.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, jesting because of the pity in his heart. "What manners, *niñita*, to address a passing stranger—as though you were a painted woman of the streets!"

He picked her up in his arms. She snuggled against his breast, and a shiver ran through him, like a network, immensely delicate and immensely powerful, of a million feathery touches; and feeling her tears hot on his fingers, he stroked her soft cheeks very gently.

"Why," he told her, "you are safe! Safe!"

"Of course I am safe," she whispered, "with you!"

A few seconds later Pedro came up. "Look," cried Esteban, "what the wilderness has sent us!"

"What is your name, child?" asked Pedro.

"Juanita."

"A sweet name, by the Saints—as sweet as your small face!"

And he laughed a little as she blushed; frowned a little as she snuggled still more closely against Esteban's breast.

THAT night, after the two men had gone to the forest and come back with water and fruit, after they had bandaged the girl's ankle and washed her wounds, after they had eaten and drunk, she told them her story.

She had lived over there—she pointed vaguely to the east—where Spanish colonists had founded a settlement, planting vines and olive trees. They had done well until one day the black sickness had struck, killing the hearty men at the plow, the priests at the altar, the babes at the breast, the women at their milking and baking; carrying off her mother and brothers; scattering the few survivors to the seven winds. Her father, too, had left. He had mounted his mare, had taken his most prized possession, two Toledo blades, and putting his daughter on the saddle behind him, had started out for the Andes.

But the black sickness had been in his blood. Crossing the desert, he had been smitten—"as if by lightning," she described it—and died. She had ridden on, had lost her way. There had been hunger, thirst, suffering. Three days earlier, she had reached this place. But her horse had shied at a snake, had thrown her and run away. She had injured her foot—had been helpless, in despair. And now—

"You came to me," she said to Esteban, "in the hour of need. The blessed Saints sent you to me, and perhaps,"—with faint coquetry—"me to you?"

He glanced at her. He sensed the magic of her beauty, with the blurred indistinctness of overwhelming desire. And she smiled at Esteban—and Pedro saw the smile; read the meaning behind it; was conscious of a stabbing pain.

The pain, he knew, of jealousy! Jealousy because Esteban was his friend, whom, in spite of all that had

passed, he loved, and who he did not want to lose to Juanita. And jealousy because—oh, yes!—he loved Juanita. He did not want to lose her to Esteban; and dully he wondered:

"Whom do I love more? The man or the woman?"

Here was a question with no answer at all; rather, with two answers, giving



the lie to each other—until, looking up, he saw her left hand drop gently on the wrist of Esteban, who had fallen asleep, and he said to himself.

"I should have strangled him that time, near the water-hole! Then there would be no Esteban tonight."

He half rose. He clenched his fingers. Then, quickly, he relaxed.

"O Mary, Mother of God," he prayed silently, "protect me against the snares of the devil!"

Thus, each night, his prayer, as each day he watched the affection ripen between Esteban and Juanita, while he felt himself left out more and more in the cold. For they were so selfish in their love.

Their love? No. He would not, could not believe it.

That Esteban loved Juanita? Yes. But how could Juanita love Esteban? Why, he loved her—he, Pedro! And—if Esteban were out of the way—

Day after day this thought, this wish, becoming more and more compelling. Night after night his prayer: "O Mary, Mother of God, protect me against the snares of the devil!"

In the meantime Juanita's foot had almost healed. One day, too, they heard a plaintive neighing. The mare



A few seconds later Pedro came up. "Look," cried Esteban, "what the wilderness has sent us."

had returned. They found, still strapped to the saddle, the two Toledo swords which had belonged to her father.

She gave one to Esteban, one to Pedro, saying:

"Are you not my two champions?"

By Saturday she was able to hobble about, and Esteban suggested that tomorrow they should be on their way. Here was the forest: the mountains were near, sloping down to the plain.

"And then home!" he cried exultingly. "Lima!"

"I shall be lonely there," she said.

"Lonely," laughed Esteban, "with me ever at your left side?"

"And I," cut in Pedro, "ever at your right."

She looked at him. She gave a little shudder when she saw the hard gleam in his eyes. Then she dismissed her fear, told herself she was imagining things, as Pedro drew his arm through Esteban's in friendly fashion and went on:

"Let's go to the forest—and fill our water-bag."

They turned away from the camp; and she could not hear his next words:

"If I were you, I would take my blade along."

For he had made up his mind. Murder it could not be, since Esteban was his friend. Nor could he give up Juanita without a struggle. There-

fore, whispered the kink in his Spanish brain, it must be a crossing of steel to decide who was the stronger man, the better man; and the girl—was it not always so?—would follow this stronger, better man's piping.

Esteban did not understand immediately.

"Take my sword along?" he echoed. "What for?"

"To see about a girl's heart—and my own heart and yours."

Then Esteban knew what way the wind was blowing.

"What has fighting to do with it?" he demanded. "She loves me—not you."

"It is you indeed whom she loves—now."

"She will never cease loving me."

"Pah—dead lips cannot kiss. She will forget you when you are in your grave."

Esteban shrugged. He too was a Spaniard, with a Spaniard's chilly pride, a Spaniard's chilly courage. Not that he hated Pedro. No, no! Pedro was his friend. But there was Juanita. She would love him the more tenderly when he came back to her—from danger and victory.

"If you are as good at fighting," he said, "as you are at boasting—"

"I am. And sorry that I must kill my best friend because of a mere woman."

So, presently, in a clearing in the forest, they were at it: two reckless men evenly matched at fence and parry; steel beating on steel like sticks on a drum, cries peaking throatily as they warned to the game:

"By Our Lady!"

"By the Trinity!"

Din and ring and rattle. Weapons clanking, tinkling. A song of strife. A song that echoed through the forest, louder and louder—and Juanita heard.

She jumped up. As rapidly as her bandaged ankle would let her, she ran, following the sounds. She reached the clearing. There they were, thrusting, slashing, trying to bring death to each other. . . . And fear for her lover came to her, and she picked up a large jagged stone. She threw it with all her young strength.

It struck Pedro between the eyes. He fell, lay there unconscious. She ran forward.

"Kill him!" she cried to Esteban.

FOR she was a girl from the south of Spain, where Moorish blood causes love to ripen quickly, savagely; and hate too to ripen quickly, savagely. And this Pedro—she was afraid of him, afraid of the gleam in his eyes and the brooding, tortured thoughts behind his eyes. There should be short quit-tance for him—and the world, hereafter, would be the more happy and ardent and secure for Esteban and herself. She cried again:

"Kill him!"
 "How can I?" asked Esteban. "He is my friend."
 "He tried to kill you."
 "Decently, properly—in fight."

THEN when she argued, insisted he must kill him—must! *must!*—he told her, a trifle impatiently, that there were certain ticklish points of honor between Spanish *caballeros* which no woman could understand. And he washed the other's wounded forehead, and when the man had regained consciousness, helped him to his feet and put an arm about him.

"I am grateful," said Pedro, "because you stayed your hand."

"That time, in the desert, near the water-hole, you stayed yours. The score is even."

"Must never again be made uneven. I am your friend—always!"

"And I am yours—always!"

They looked at each other, with deep affection. Almost it seemed as if, momentarily, they were unaware of Juanita's presence. This made her angry and she exclaimed:

"The burning black shame on me that I should be willing to give my heart to one lout of a man, and he willing to be brawling over my kisses with another lout of a man! As if, by the Saints, I were a sack of oats to be bartered and sold!"

"B-but—" stammered Esteban.

"But—nothing!" She took a step forward. "Listen to me, rowdies both! One of you I never loved nor ever shall. The other I love no longer. I shall find me a fat man when I get to Lima, an elderly, peaceful man, and I care not if he be English heretic or infidel Jew. Only—none like you two."

She walked away, her nose in the air; and Esteban looked after her and said unhappily:

"And now she is lost to the both of us."

Pedro's laugh was short and cracked.

"Little you know," he replied, "of the quirks in a girl's heart. You she wants—you, you! And for me she can see no better dwelling than the grave. Still—how can I give up hope as long as life is in my bones?" He sighed. "Ah," he repeated, "little you know of the quirks in a girl's heart."

He was right. For later that day, as they were about to start on their journey, and while Pedro was saddling the horse, she said to Esteban:

"If I had any pride at all, I would turn my back on you for ever and a day. But—I cannot."

He took her in his arms. He kissed her.

"You love me?" was his eager question.

"There are a hundred better men in Peru. And yet—I love you, and you alone."

"As I love you—and you alone."



Pedro lay there unconscious. "Kill him,"

"And that," she cried, "is a lie! There is Pedro. Him too you love." Her eyes blazed, then quickly softened. She ran her fingers through his curly hair; and she whispered: "Whom do you love more—him or me?"

Had he been shrewder, he would have given her one reply, speaking from his brain. But being the honest man he was, he gave her the other, speaking from his soul:

"I love him with a different sort of love."

She stared at him. She did not speak. But she bit her nether lip in a style that meant temper.

Her mind—as presently, they started out, she astride the horse, Esteban

walking by her side and Pedro a few steps behind—was in a turmoil. She had never loved before. Now that love had come to her, it was savage, because it was so possessive. Esteban was hers. She wanted to share his affection with nobody. This jealousy hurt her. Yet, queerly, she relished it. Sweetness it meant—and bitterness.

But Pedro—as mile after mile the forest spanned green, the road to the Andes now clearly marked—found no sweetness at all in his own love, found only bitterness—bitterness that tasted like gall as he watched Esteban and Juanita, heard them laughing, singing, telling each other the tender silly things which are the way of love.



Juanita cried to Esteban.

Pedro trudged behind, silent, brooding.

So selfish they were, he reflected, so selfish! They had forgotten him. Even Esteban, his friend, had forgotten him. He shrugged. Pah, he thought, what of it? There were both girls in the world, with lips as red as Juanita's and arms more generous; and other brisk, burly men to ride with, stirrup to stirrup! But he knew that he was lying to himself, because of his Spanish pride. There was only one girl for him, only one friend.

Caught between friendship and love, he had lost both. Had, by the same token, lost everything. And he kept on his way, his head sunk on his

chest; was suddenly startled by Esteban's exclamation:

"Over there! Ah—the Saints be praised!"

Pedro looked up. He saw, straight ahead, a wide clearing; saw a tracery of fruit trees in orderly pattern; saw the silhouettes of adobe houses, barns, a little church. A Spanish settlement, doubtless. And friendly hearths here, and friendly hearts; and decent food once more, decent beds, and presently a guide to put them on the right road.

He laughed, and so did Esteban.

In his eagerness, the latter vaulted on the horse in back of Juanita—a stout horse, which did not mind the extra weight. He put his arms around

her, took the reins, urged the animal to greater speed—while Pedro trudged behind—then all at once hurried forward, grabbed the reins, turned the horse around and cried:

"No, no!"

"What's the matter?" asked Esteban.

Pedro pointed. Men were coming from the village. But they were not Spaniards. Indians they were. Savage Peruvian Indians of the Chiquibamba tribe. Tall, copper-skinned men, brandishing weapons.

Never since the days of Pizarro, thirty years earlier, had these Chiquibambas submitted to the alien yoke. They had taken toll from the Spaniards over and over again—in blood and torture and death; they must have danced out of the forest, attacked and conquered this village.

Now they saw the hated white faces. They came running, yelling. Esteban and Pedro stared at each other; and the latter was the first to speak:

"The Indians have no horses. And we have—"

"One!"

"But strong enough," said Pedro, "to carry two—yourself and Juanita."

"And leave you to face death—alone?" Esteban shook his head. He jumped from the saddle. He said to the girl: "Ride hard, best beloved! My place is here—by my friend's side!"

"And here too, by your friend's—by my friend's—side, is my own place," she declared.

Already she had kicked off one stirrup, when Esteban laughed loudly, triumphantly.

"The Saints bless you!" he cried. "But not your place by our side today—but by our side, my friend's and mine, hereafter, in Paradise! Ah, we two—but I especially—shall wait for you—in Paradise!"

AND suddenly he struck the mare's flank vigorously with the flat of his sword. The animal snorted, plunged, raced away—while Pedro and Esteban turned to face the enemy.

"For the sake of the True Cross!" they shouted—they, the robbers, the bandits. And perhaps they meant it. Now they rushed toward the crimson wind of the Chiquibamba spears. . . .

It was a week later, in the Convent of Our Lady of Infinite Mercy, that Juanita, told the Mother Superior what had happened. The Mother Superior said:

"There died two Christian gentlemen."

"Indeed!" replied Juanita, just a little stiffly. "Were they not both my friends? Were they not both Spanish caballeros?"

She paused, then added softly: "My duty, my glorious duty, to pray for them! Ah—perhaps I can pray better after I have taken the veil."



An American bomber crew is forced down on a Vichy French African coast. A stirring story by the author of "The Free Shall Live"

AFRICA

RAOUL DEBOREL sheathed the glasses, hung the case on its hook. Nothing in sight, as there had been nothing in sight for weeks, as there might be nothing in sight for months, even for years. That depended on how long the war could last. It was over three years now, for this was October.

At very rare intervals, planes droned high in the sky: a French machine from Senegal bound for Bassam or Kotonu, a British patrol from Sierra

Leone, on the prowl for submarines, or a scout from some convoy of ships far out to sea. The sound of the motors would dwindle and vanish; then the horizon would be empty.

Before him, Port-Dabou sprawled under the downpour of heat, white walls and tin roofs, very tall, graceful coconut-palms. The odor of rancid copra, of oil warmed by the sun, drifted in the still air. The rumbling of the surf as the combers rolled in from the Gulf of Guinea, to curl and

crumble in rainbows of spray along the golden ledge of the straight beach, was as regular, as monotonous as the breathing of a sleeping man—seemed to become absorbed, lost in the dark green of the dense forest beyond the lagoon. The long months had made that endless thundering so normal that it had ceased to be a sound at all.

Thirty months without a break, without a respite. Raoul paced the veranda, an average man, in height, in build—a man getting on, for he



LANDING *by Georges Surdez*

was graying above the temples. The faded tunic hanging over his torso had the gold braid of colonial administrator buttoned to its cuffs. He had come to represent the Republic, and he now represented that phantom creation of Vichy, the French State.

He was safe enough at this isolated post. And he had the right to be safe. He was close to forty-three; and a wound received long ago, somewhere north of Rheims in 1918, had left him with a slight limp. Moreover,

France was no longer at war. France had been knocked out of the fight.

But there were Frenchmen who fought on, both at home and abroad, and Raoul wanted to be with them. Not very far away, down the Coast, there was a place where Free Frenchmen could live without humiliation. His experience in Africa, his knowledge of natives, would be useful there. But he could not go.

He could not go, because he had brought an anchor along, a wife. He

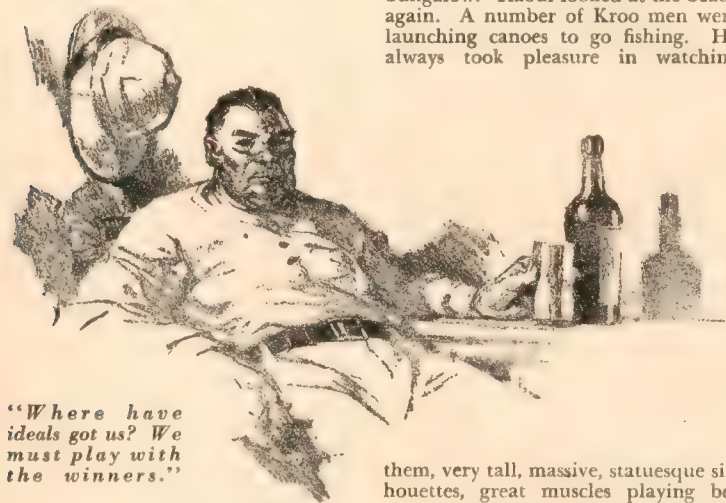
had loved her, and he still loved her. But he often wished that he had left her in France, with their children. She did not understand what was going on; she could not understand how he felt: that inaction, waiting, were killing something in him—self-respect, pride. Charlotte was a woman, and the broader concepts of patriotism escaped her. He had promised—

"Raoul, have you taken your quinine?"

"I have, dear, yes."

She was pale, he noticed, and she was growing thinner. Her face, framed in the blonde hair, lighted by clear, Breton-blue eyes, remained beautiful. How old was she? Thirty-two. She looked like a child, yet somehow older than her age. The climate—worries—

"Benedetti didn't come?"



"Where have ideals got us? We must play with the winners."

"I made him understand that I didn't want him."

"Was that wise, Raoul?"

"Oh, he's reported me as a De Gaulle already, never fear," he replied. "I may have to tolerate a spy in my offices, and it might as well be a customs man. But I don't have to have him for a friend." He lifted his hand to check her protest: "I know all you're going to say, Lotte. That he is as honest in his beliefs as I am. You know that's not true; but you are afraid he'll make a report that will be believed, and that our children will suffer for it. Let me repeat, that's nonsense. Frenchmen may have sunk low, but not so low as to persecute children."

When the children were mentioned, she could no longer think, no longer reason. He saw her body stiffen with alarm. But she forced a patient smile.

"Raoul, I'm not insane. I'm not afraid they'll shoot Charlotte or Pierre, our little Jeannot. But if you are dismissed from the service, it will be known at home. Your sister—"

"My sister would make out somehow." But he walked over to her, kissed her cheek: "I know, I know. You're worried. But I'm not going to lose my position, that's promised. Don't worry about Benedetti. No one pays any attention to him. He was sending nasty secret reports long before this happened. A mania with him." A sudden thought angered him; he burst out: "I don't under-

stand him. He's a Corsican. If they win, he'll become an Italian."

"He says not—that there's an agreement with the Germans that we'll keep Corsica. That it's our only chance, to keep in with the Nazis. He says that England—"

"I know. He's pro-boche."

Charlotte left him and went into the bungalow. Raoul looked at the beach again. A number of Kroo men were launching canoes to go fishing. He always took pleasure in watching

them, very tall, massive, statuesque silhouettes, great muscles playing beneath the shining black skins. He saw the gleam of their teeth, heard their happy laughter. The isolation of the port had brought them loss of work and money, some privations, but they did not fret, never worried. They had slid back casually into their old ways of life. Why not? Many of the old men remembered the days before the French had come.

RAOUL—

His wife was at his side. She held photographs in her hands, some of them large, mounted professional pictures, others snapshots. He repressed his impatience. He loved his children too, and they were seldom out of his thoughts. But need they torture themselves with this endless talk?

"Jeannot will be seven next week. I'd promised him a sailor suit with a real whistle for his seventh birthday. Like the one Pierre wore the day we left. You remember?"

"Of course." Raoul smiled. "We have reminded my sister of it ten times. If it's at all possible, she'll get him the suit. She loves our kids as much as her own."

"Suppose the letters got lost, Raoul? Letters often get lost, and they take so long, anyway. Jeannot will think I've forgotten."

"What are you trying to do?" he asked. "We cannot go home now. I've asked." He looked at her, and feared she had gone a little mad. Coaxing her would be no use—she would start weeping. "Lotte, I've

done everything. I've compromised with my conscience to stay on here. I'm not going to lose my pension. Your children will not be paupers. Is that clear?" He slapped his hand down on the rail: "And I shall not be a rash old fool! I'll waste myself to death in this forsaken hole while others are trying to do something. Will you, in heaven's name, tell me what else I can do?"

"Raoul!"

"And I have taken my quinine, both pills." He picked up his sun-helmet, slammed it on his head. "I'm even going to see Monsieur Benedetti and lick his boots. Does that make you happy?"

On the beach, one of the Kroo men, a gigantic old fellow with a fringe of beard like white moss sprouting from mahogany, trotted to him and blurted out something in pidgin-French, pointing at the sea. Raoul looked, and saw nothing. These people were like huge children. When they grew bored, they imagined things.

"All right, Bosso. You go look see."

Benedetti, in trousers and undershirt, was on his veranda, facing a bottle and a glass. He was huge, swarthy and sweaty. Small, sharp eyes were set like coffee-beans in the tallow of his face. Ten years as an army sergeant, eighteen more as a minor official, had steeped this brute into a rigid routine. His clammy hand swallowed Raoul's fingers greedily.

"Monsieur l'Administrateur, sit down, sit down. I thought I had angered you. Boy, a drink, quick, before I pat your pants with my foot! See here, I concede that Laval is a crook. But he is a shrewd crook, and that's what we need. Where have ideals got us? We must play with the winners. England? You are too young to remember Fashoda. I do. The Americans? They are well-intentioned, but you see, they're in America."

Raoul wanted to weep, and he wanted to laugh. He listened to the stupid man's patter, because he had three children in France. It was ludicrous, but he was protecting little Charlotte, Pierre and Jeannot by keeping silent, smiling and nodding. For this lout could write, unfortunately. He wrote badly, and he couldn't spell. But he could report an unguarded statement, such as that De Gaulle upheld the honor of France before the world.

"Yes, I see your point, Benedetti. No, I didn't think—"

The servant, an Agni boy, a sturdy, black little fellow in a colorful loin-cloth, came to the table. He rubbed a horny foot against his shin.

"White men live for beach," he proclaimed.

"What white men, fool?" Benedetti asked. He named the few white traders remaining in this dead port.

The lad shook his head.
"No be white man this place, Massa. Men from sky. Come from sea. Sick too much. Maybe go die."

ON the beach, a group of shouting, gesticulating Kroo men surrounded an overturned surf-boat. Raoul stilled their shrill clamor with a few words, pushed his way among their dripping bodies. There were white men squatted in the shade, three of them. The leader of the Kroos indicated a rubber life-raft which they had retrieved also.

"They sleep. No savvy nothing."
No, the men were not sleeping, for their eyes were open. But they were not fully conscious. Judging by their teeth, their hair, all three were young. But the tropical sun had burned them as they sprawled on their raft. They were almost naked. Their lips were swollen, their eyes puffed, and the tongues showed, enlarged and rough as sponges, when they tried to speak.

"Are you English?" Raoul asked.
Three heads shook in unison, three mouths opened, and incoherent syllables issued. It was evident that they were dying of thirst. And of hunger, and of fatigue. Holding on to a raft at sea can be very strenuous work! It was obvious that they were dazed, that they did not know where they were, that the black men and the white men floated before their eyes like vague figures in a painful dream. They had reached the limit of their endurance, and if the Kroos had not spotted them out to sea and brought them in, they would have drifted by the port—and would have died, somewhere between sky and water.

Raoul ordered them taken to the visitors' bungalow, in his own yard.

He would have to do the best he could for them, with the help of Charlotte and a Senegalese orderly who had worked in a hospital. They were given water to drink carefully; salve was applied to their burns.

"I informed the capital," Benedetti said, smiling, a while later. He had vanished for a space, and Raoul now knew why. "Thought you might forget. I think, although they deny it, that these guys are English. Here's the reply."

The administrator was instructed to guard the unknown men carefully, pending a fuller investigation. He looked at Benedetti and wanted to strike him in the face. But he took a deep breath, smiled.

"Thank you. You'll stay for a drink, I hope." He turned to his wife, who was entering: "How are they now, Lotte?"

"They've stopped grabbing for water and they've gone to sleep." She smiled: "They'll be all right when

they wake up. A little sore, but all right. They're so young and strong. Won't you stay for dinner, Monsieur Benedetti?"

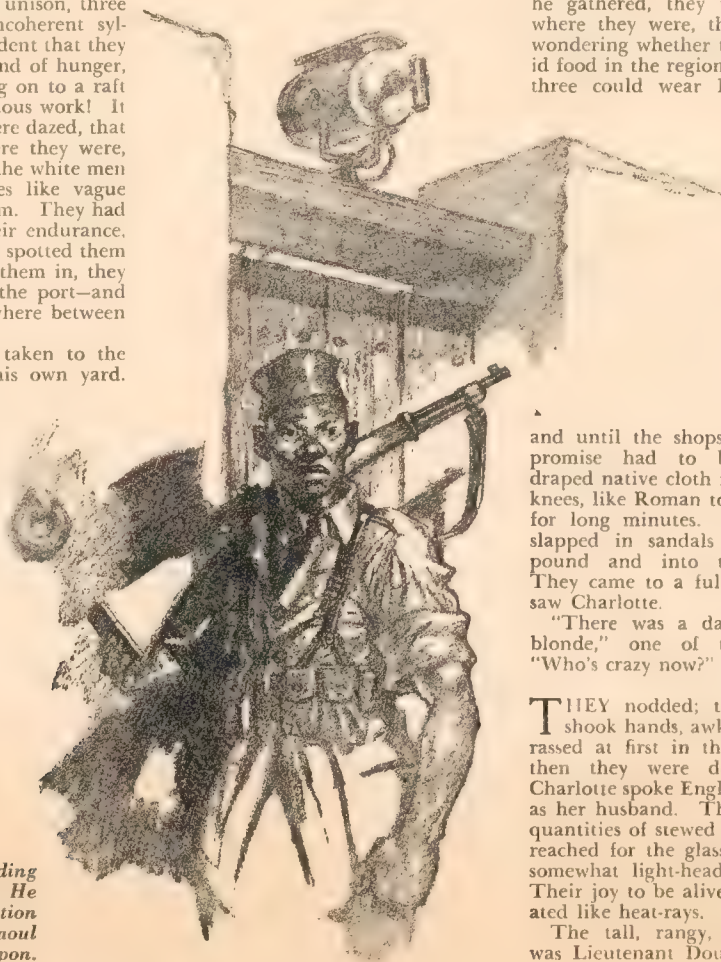
"I can't refuse a charming lady anything," Benedetti agreed, with a ceremonious bow. . . .

For twenty-four hours the three strangers slept, awaking only to ask for water and to swallow the broth and soaked bread-crusts prepared by Charlotte. They must have all awakened at once, with something like a verbal explosion. Raoul and his wife, from their veranda, heard loud voices, laughter, then the clattering of tin and crockery.

"They're English, after all," Raoul declared.

"No, Americans." Charlotte smiled gently. "Makes me feel old and young all at once to hear them. When I was a little girl, they had a big camp near Le Mans, where we lived."

When Raoul entered the guest bungalow, the three naked young men greeted him with a shout. In order, he gathered, they were asking him where they were, thanking him and wondering whether there was any solid food in the region. Not one of the three could wear Raoul's garments



A garde-cerle was striding gravely back and forth. He was a delicate suggestion from Benedetti which Raoul thought it best to act upon.

and until the shops opened, a compromise had to be made. They draped native cloth from shoulders to knees, like Roman togas, and laughed for long minutes. Then they slapped in sandals across the compound and into the dining-room. They came to a full stop when they saw Charlotte.

"There was a dame, and she's a blonde," one of them whispered. "Who's crazy now?"

THEY nodded; they smiled, they shook hands, awkward and embarrassed at first in their strange garb; then they were delighted because Charlotte spoke English almost as well as her husband. They ate enormous quantities of stewed chicken and rice, reached for the glasses often, became somewhat light-headed on the wine. Their joy to be alive and eating radiated like heat-rays.

The tall, rangy, light-haired one was Lieutenant Douglas Pierson, the



pilot. He was the oldest, a ripe twenty-six. The thick-set, dark one with the bush of hair was Sergeant Nathan Kalb, twenty-three. And the big chap with the enormous hands, bold eyes and shy grin was James Early, twenty years old, and a gunner. There had been a fourth, whom they mentioned briefly, the navigator. He had been there; then he had been gone. That was all they remembered.

Raoul asked them where they had come from and where they had been going. Kalb started to talk about Florida, but Pierson coughed, and the dark lad reached for his glass with a faint shrug and a glance of apology at his hosts. Raoul smiled. He had heard over the radio that the Americans were flying their bombers across the Atlantic to Free French Africa. The rest was not difficult to reconstruct.

"When did you crash?" inquired Raoul.

"What's the date? When were we brought here?" When they were told, Pierson whistled. "Six days ago. We must have drifted four days. We had a little water the first two. Say, it's lucky that old guy spotted us. We haven't a thing left, but you can bet we won't forget him when we get home."

"You had a pistol," Raoul informed him. "I'm keeping it in my private office, in the desk. I have to keep it." He showed them the official telegram. "You read enough French to understand. This is the Ivory Coast. France is no longer a belligerent. I regret to inform you that you will be interned for the duration of the war."

"Here?" all three asked as one. They exchanged dismayed glances.

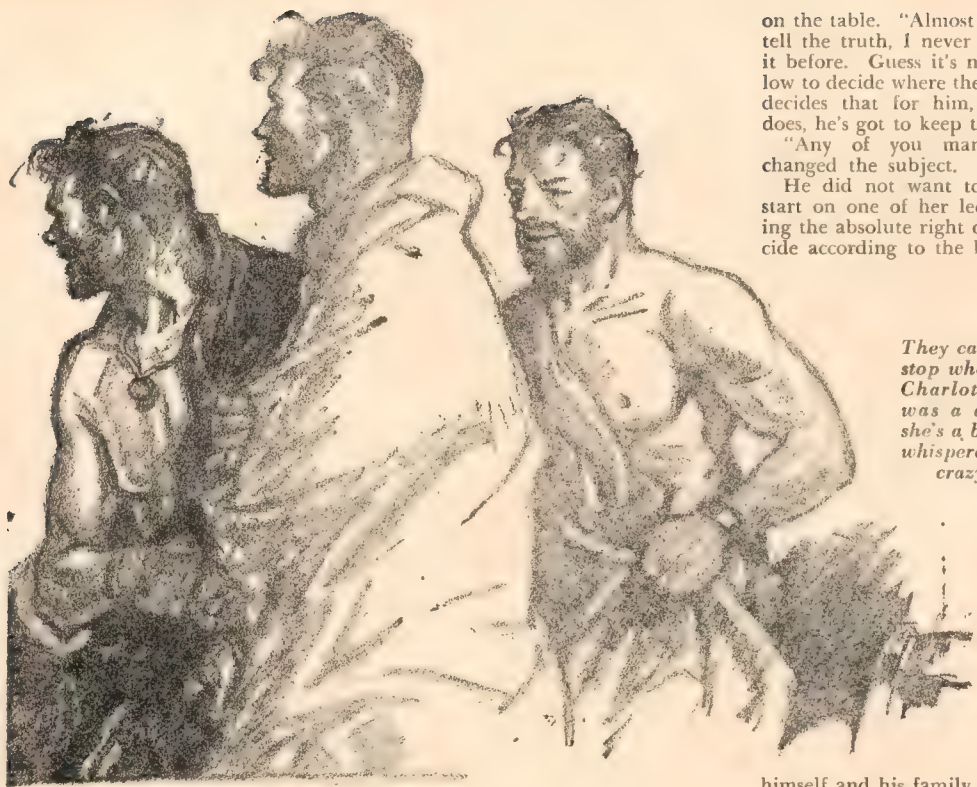
"Here or in one of the larger settlements. You'll probably be taken to Bingerville."

"The hell we will!" young Early blurted out. "Listen, Mister—"

"Shut up, Jimmy," Pierson advised gently.

"What the— Oh, okay, okay, Lieutenant."

And Early explored a dish with his fork, to find another hard-boiled



Illustrated by
Raymond
Sisley

egg in the peanut sauce. "Quite a dish, lady! Footoo, you call it?"

"This is Vichy territory, eh?" Pierson's eyes met those of Raoul. After a second, both smiled. "I suppose it would be hard to get away, too."

"Very hard. Impossible overland." Raoul shrugged. "Thick bush and forest, few trails, roads watched. The only way would be to win the confidence of some Kroo or Apollonian boatmen, and that's hard without money."

"Suppose we had the money?"

"Then you could get a boat and a Negro crew, sail along the Coast to Accra or Lagos, on British soil. In two, three, four days you'd be there. That would depend on the boat, the crew and the weather. Risky trip in an open boat, if there is a storm."

"We'd need supplies, food and water." The young flyer gestured in per-

fect imitation of Raoul. "And we have no money—we are strangers. As you said, it's impossible."

"And there's this, also—" Raoul indicated the gate of the yard. A Negro *garde-cerle*, wearing a scarlet skull-cap, khaki tunic and pants, but no shoes, was striding gravely back and forth, an old Gras rifle on his shoulder. He was a delicate suggestion from Benedetti which Raoul had thought it best to act upon.

All three guests smiled.

"I should think," Charlotte spoke suddenly, "that you would not be so crazy as to get into trouble again. Why, if that Negro had not seen you, you'd be dead, all three of you."

"But we're not dead, madame," Pierson pointed out, "and the war is going on. I thought Frenchwomen understood those things."

Raoul grew red, and even Charlotte had a tinge of color in her cheeks. The young man was sipping his coffee, unaware that he had said anything untactful.

"But you've done your duty," she insisted. Her husband saw on her face the set stubborn expression he feared.

"So far, yes ma'am."

"So far, so far! Isn't there a limit?"

"I don't know." Pierson had lighted an English cigarette taken from the tin

on the table. "Almost like ours! To tell the truth, I never thought about it before. Guess it's not up to a fellow to decide where the limit is. Luck decides that for him, and until he does, he's got to keep trying."

"Any of you married?" Raoul changed the subject.

He did not want to let Charlotte start on one of her lectures concerning the absolute right of a man to decide according to the best interest of

They came to a full stop when they saw Charlotte. "There was a dame, and she's a blonde," one whispered. "Who's crazy now?"

himself and his family. These young men would not understand her, might even misjudge her. The conversation drifted to the people they had left at home, and the usual, touchingly absurd invitations for "after the war is over" were exchanged.

LATE in the afternoon, four days after, Raoul received a telegram from Headquarters. The authorities acknowledged receipt of the names and ranks of the rescued aviators, but insisted upon further details. It was understood from local information that the Americans were permitted to roam at will through the town. As soon as the schedule of the lagoon steamer permitted, an Intelligence officer would come to question them. Meanwhile, the administrator was to exert great vigilance.

"You'll be held responsible if they escape," Charlotte said.

"I beg your pardon," Raoul protested. "They can't blame me. A sentry has been assigned to watch them and follow them. They are not common-law prisoners, nor enemies of France. And the instructions not to grant them the liberty usually left interned soldiers in a neutral country have just arrived."

"Yet you know they'll blame you. Benedetti will—"

"No." Raoul grinned. "I delegated Benedetti, as a former army ser-

geant, to take the proper precautions against escape. He accepted, in front of three of my clerks. He's been on their heels ever since. They've run him ragged."

That was true. The three Americans were as restless as small boys, as active. Raoul had contrived to clothe them in the shops, at Government expense, had convinced them, after long argument, that the sun's rays were dangerous. They wore sun-helmets. But they had an insatiable curiosity about everything—the coconuts, the lagoon, the canoes, the fish-nets.

"I'll have to notify them that they must remain indoors," Raoul said. "I don't like to."

"Here they are, back again," Charlotte announced. She called them in from the veranda: "My husband must see you!"

They trooped into the office. Then Charlotte saw that Lieutenant Pierson had a big pistol in his hand, that Jimmy held a handsome double-barreled shotgun, property of Benedetti, while Kalb had the big Gras rifle usually toted by the Negro guard. They looked very happy.

"Don't worry, madame," the rangy officer started. "We won't hurt your husband. But he must come down to the beach with us. The Kroos won't leave unless he gives them permission. They want his okay on taking the surfboat so far."

"Where is Monsieur Benedetti, Lieutenant?" Raoul asked.

"We didn't hurt him. Had to muss him up a little, though. You'll find the guard with him. They're tied. No trouble at all."

RAOUL fought for a serious scowl. "I must warn you that you have been guilty of assault upon Government employees, and that all further—"

"We also robbed, M. Leborel, broke and entered, took Government funds. We realize all that, and we're desperate men. You can sue us after the war." He hefted the pistol meaningly: "Nothing you can do now, though. We are armed, and you're not!"

"You are very foolish young men," Raoul resumed stiffly. "You must understand that as soon as you are gone, I shall give the alarm all up and down the Coast. That if you pass in sight of Grand Bassam or any other French port, an armed launch will be sent to arrest you!"

"We'll bear that in mind, sure," Pierson said. He checked himself. "That's our business, Mister. Come along quietly, and speak your piece."

When the three stopped to take leave of Charlotte, she ran out of the room, crying. Pierson called out after her: "Please don't worry—everything is all right. Nobody'll get hurt—and thanks a lot." He turned to Raoul:

"Couldn't find the cartridges for this gun. I'd like them."

"I saw you hadn't found them." Raoul gave him a paper parcel. "They're in here. Too bad Benedetti'll never know the gun was not loaded."

"We'll send him a postal card. Let's get going."

The four walked out into the sunlight, onto the beach. Not far away, nine powerful Kroo men were standing beside a righted surfboat, ready to shove her into the sea. A sizable crowd of natives, with three or four of the town's white men, stood watching curiously from a distance.

"Sure you have enough food and water?" Raoul asked.

"Enough for a week. And those guys claim they can make it in three days."

"You'll have to watch them. Not bad fellows, but very lazy. If they have the money, and they can turn you over to the people in Bassam, for instance, they'll do it. One of you will have to keep awake all the time. They won't try anything by force, but they may try to trick you. Keep far out to sea, out of sight. I wish I could go along."

"Why don't you?"

"Too old, my friend, and too married."

"She's a swell girl. She worries a lot about her kids."

They had come up to the spectators, and the young officer changed his manner. "No use arguing, Mister. You tell those fellows we have the money to pay them, and that they're to take us."

"Better do as they ask," one of the Frenchmen called from the crowd. "They're sun-crazy, the lot of them."

Yet Raoul knew that sympathy was with the escaping men, so far as the French were concerned. There was a militia post at the other end of the town, and no one had gone to call the soldiers.

"I'll do what you ask," he said loudly. "You're fools, and you'll be drowned, but I must obey. What do you wish me to say?"

The headman of the boat-crew came forward. Raoul outlined his duties in pidgin-French, assured him that neither he nor his family would be held responsible for the boat or punished in any manner. But he looked into the fellow's eyes and grew worried. He knew such natives well, and could sense that the big helmsman had something in the back of his head.

Intelligent, strong and young as these aviators were, despite their resolution and their guns, as soon as the boat was afloat, they would be at the mercy of the crew. It is so easy to simulate helplessness against the currents, to drift in toward the shore. And as easy to capsize at a convenient

spot, whence a good swimmer could reach shore without danger. All Kroos swim like otters.

Raoul had the impression that these poor fellows were doomed, that it would have been as well to leave them on their raft. But they did not realize this, and it was too late to change plans. They must leave. According to French law, they had become common-law criminals, thieves. His real duty was to go with them, because the Kroos knew him and liked him. It was the belief that these strangers were forcing him to act against his wishes that had brought about this grave danger he had not foreseen.

THE Negroes' intentions were so obvious to anyone familiar with their ways that the Frenchman who had spoken before called out: "Let them go, *Monsieur l'Administrateur!* Those lads will take good care of them."

"Listen, Lieutenant—" he started.

"For—" Pierson choked off an oath. "Let's get out of this. That grease-ball may break loose and start a row. We'll watch out, don't worry." He slapped the nearest boatman on his shoulder. "Come on, Amos, get steam up!"

The Negroes obediently bent to their task: smooth muscles swelled along their legs, backs and arms. They were sullen and grinning as the massive craft slithered over the hard sand. The old man who gave the signals for the safe crossing of the surf trotted to a higher spot, from which he could look out to sea above the breaking combers. The whistle already was at his lips.

Raoul guessed the scheme in a flash.

The Kroos would not wait to be picked up by a patrol boat off Grand Bassam; they would waste no time. The finish would come here and now, inside the next five minutes.

Getting a boat out to sea through the triple line of breakers was an art, a difficult undertaking. It was a matter of good judgment on the part of the man watching from the shore and giving the whistle signals, of perfect understanding between the helmsman and the eight paddlers crouched on the gunwales.

And the skill that could not always prevent accidents could with great certainty create an accident. That boat would be overturned by a comber, so deftly, so suddenly, that the unsuspecting young men would have no time to menace, to shoot. They would be hurled in the swirling water, helpless. They would drown, or be crushed by the rolling boat. At best, they would be fished out, half-choked, dripping, captured and held on criminal charges.

"Pierson—"

"Cut it, cut it!" The tail flyer shoved him aside. He had a hand

on the gunwale, ready to leap in. His jaws were clenched; his blue eyes blazed. Ahead was freedom, another chance to serve. That was what he thought. But of what use would be that superb determination, that great courage?

"You'll be drowned like rats—"

"All right. But let's get going!"

"I'm going with you," Raoul said.

Within him, his heart was as cold as ice. He had to sacrifice Charlotte for these boys. There was no excuse now. These men were flyers, valuable men to the cause he believed in. She would never understand. She would think he had deserted her, their children, to follow a foolish illusion of youth and fighting worth. But as Pierson had said, no man could set the limits of his duty.

"Fine, fine!"

But the boatmen had halted and turned.

Someone was running down the slope of the beach, crying out for them to wait. It was Charlotte, wearing her traveling costume and a hat, and carrying her pocketbook. Behind her trotted two of the house-boys, lugging bags and suitcases.

"Put them in the boat," she panted. She handed the lads a sheaf of small bills. "You good boys too much." She hoisted herself into the craft. "Yes, Raoul, we're going. I couldn't make up my mind until I saw them leaving. Then I just knew I'd breathe easier out there, with decent people." She called out to the old Kroo up the beach: "Be careful, Bosso! Don't get my good dress wet!"

He lifted his hand in greeting and farewell.

"No fear, mammy! Me, Bosso, I savvy surf pass all men!"

Raoul had climbed in after her, and as soon as the boat was afloat, the three aviators piled in, laughing and joking. The Negroes gave a last push, leaped aboard, their paddles flashed.

"Woh! Guee-ya at-su, guee-ya at-su—"

Behind them, the strident piping had started, as their panting chant lifted. The boat sped toward the breakers. . . .

Then they were across, in the open sea. Charlotte looked back at the straight line of the shore, at the white walls and tin roofs, the tall, graceful palms. For thirty months, that bungalow had been her home.

Raoul held her hand.

"I'd decided to go, too. They need me. And it's the right thing. We'll never be sorry. After all this is over, you'll see, they'll be proud of us."

"Yes, yes." Charlotte dabbed at her eyes, breathed deeply and managed a faint smile. "Well, Raoul, it's done. I really hated it, dear, hated that awful Benedetti, the lies, the pretense." Her eyes ranged about the boat, fastened



"We're desperate men. . . . Nothing you can do now—we are armed!"

on Pierson, who was helping to rig up the mast: "*Monsieur le lieutenant américain!*"

He turned and looked at her with his friendly smile.

"Yes, Madame Leboirel?"

Charlotte held her husband's arm proudly.

"Frenchwomen still understand those things."

Mr. Honey Gets

LET us understand each other: If a powerful Lama, fresh and fragrant—well, fairly fragrant for a Lama—from Tibet, land of magic and mystery, gave you a bottle of pills, each one of which possessed the power of transporting you into an unspecified one of the numberless unremembered lives you have lived before this present life, would you swallow one of these pills now and then, or would you be content to try them out on your friends?

Unlike the modern pill, there was absolutely no guarantee attached to those presented to Mr. Hobart Honey, (the pen-name of an English author and war-worker in the censorship) by the Lama whose gratitude he had earned—more by luck than design.

He was well aware that if he took one of these pills, he might re-live for a brief period the life he loved when he had been a Great Man or, against that, when he had been a wild ass, a scorpion, a ghost, a centaur, a serpent, a sawfish with the toothache, a voke ox, a newlaid egg, or a molting turkey buzzard. Anything! He never knew.

He had taken a good many of the pills, but so far, he had not had much luck. That is what he had believed. But he was not quite so sure about that as he had been. He was learning a few things.

Many—if not most—of the pills showed him that in practically all his past incarnations he had been tough beyond all the limits of present-day toughness. But against that, he had been living in tough times.

And he went on taking the pills. Would you have gone on?

A few evenings after his experience with Lowsie, the paleolithic mammoth, he felt particularly anxious for some variety in his life—temporarily. He had had a hard day's censoring—hard but dull; and any temporary escape from the current war seemed to him like pretty good escaping, even though it might land him nicely into the forefront of one of the battles of the Second Punic War, or the rear of Napoleon's Retreat from Moscow.

So, settled comfortably in his chair and slippers, he wished away a glass of port, swallowed a pill at random, and washed it onward with a second port.

"Anything for a change!" he murmured as his Adam's apple performed. "To put it no higher than that!"

He laughed drowsily.

Then all was black and silent. At least, for a moment he believed it to be so; but he was wrong, for almost immediately, he heard a voice—the lovely, dreamlike, luscious voice of a woman. For a second it sounded as if she were far off; then he knew that she was close at hand. . . .

"I have sent expressly for thee to comfort me and to assuage mine heart's desire!"

Mr. Honey opened his eyes instantly—to gaze upon the lady who had sent for him. It would have been quite understandable if he had closed them again as instantly, for she was undeniably dazzling. She was reclining in a lightly clad sort of fashion upon a silken couch under a window that admitted the rays of a setting sun; and she was beautiful with a darkling and tropical beauty that was superlative even in the Rome of 461 A.D.

She was extremely voluptuous—excusably so, for though Rome was at that time no longer quite what it had been formerly, it was still a reasonably voluptuous place.

She was staring at him with the skilled appraisement of a highly experienced woman.

"Yes," she said, "thou art a man of singularly seemly appearance, Obarton. . . . Draw close the curtains! Turn the key in the lock of the door! Speak low. I wish to talk to thee of love and serious things!"

MR. HONEY, or as he was now, in this incarnation, functioning, Obarton the Arranger, drew close the curtain, turned the key in the lock of the door, and when it was his turn to speak, spoke low. But he had no illusions about the lady. He had never seen her before, though he had heard of her; and what he could see of her now bore out everything he had ever heard of her.

She was Augusta Honoria, princess daughter of the Empress Placidia, and sister of Valentinian, the Roman Emperor.

It is now universally accepted as a truth of the first grade that Honoria literally lived for love. It was the way she was.*

*The late Mr. Edward Gibbon, author of the engaging little tome entitled "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," entirely agrees with me about this.

—Bertram.

Obarton was completely familiar with her life and times, so to express it; and he did not, of course, for a single second commit the *faux pas* of imagining that the love in her mind was bracketed with him. On the contrary, she had sent for him on a matter of business—very strict business indeed. He was a well-known Arranger, with his head office in Rome and a branch in Constantinople.

FOR a few moments she lay thinking, her eyes absently on Obarton. For his part he stood waiting, his eyes less absently on her. She was wondering exactly how to start the interview; Obarton was figuring about how much her income was.

He ran her history over in his mind as he waited, and he was conscious at once of a good deal of sympathy for her. She had been well under sixteen when they bestowed the title of *Augusta* on her—which title put her completely out of the class of any husband but a royal one. Apparently the girl's experience of the current royalties had not been so delightful that she wished for one for her own; and a year or two later she had fallen in a truly Roman way for one Eugenius, a regular fellow, who happened to be her chamberlain.

All went well for a time. Then, as is customary in these affairs, all went less well. Honoria's mother, the formidable Placidia, intervened; these were the days when intervention was intervention, and the ardent Honoria was exiled to Constantinople, where she spent the next ten or twelve years in what she regarded as somewhat dreary seclusion among the virgins connected with the court of Theodosius—a seclusion so strictly enforced that historians suggest that Honoria went well-nigh *crackerissimo*.

This may be somewhat exaggerated, but she certainly became desperate. She had gathered a good many odd scraps of information about the conquering Hun of that period, one Attila—certainly a rising man, and said by practically everybody who was afraid of him—and most people were—to have a colossal future. His reputation in Rome and Constantinople was rising like a kite. Either ignoring, or more likely not knowing the real class of this barbarian rough, the desperate Princess sent her favorite eunuch in secret to the mighty Hun, offering herself in marriage. She knew

His Hun

AN ADVENTURE
IN TRANSMIGRATION

by Bertram Atkey



nothing about him—she could not even speak his language; but anything that could get her away from her seclusion and all it implied went with Honoria—not without a certain amount of reason, for ten solid years of fasting and vigils in what the historians call “the irksome society of the sisters of Theodosius and their chosen virgins” can easily be imagined to be something of a trial to a high-spirited princess of about twenty-six.

And Attila declined her!

She, *Augusta Honoria*, sister of the Emperor, passed up by a Hun barbarian and multi-murderer! She may have been feeling lonely, but she had her pride. She never forgot it—and certainly never forgave it. Shortly after that, it became obvious to her

Ildica's luck held.... But the luck of Attila the Hun ran out forever, that night.



"Often have I wept in secret for thy sufferings, Augusta," said Obarton.

home folk at Rome that the girl had pretty well served her time, anyway. They had her back to Rome, where she gave herself a hearty welcome and was thoroughly enjoying her life and times, when suddenly who but Attila, from motives of sheer avarice and political expediency, demanded her as the latest of his innumerable wives—plus, he particularly stated, the last cent of her imperial dowry.

With the exception of that part of the foregoing which concerned Attila the Hun, Obarton knew most of the story of Honoria's troubles.

At last the Princess broke the silence:

"Thou knowest my sad history, Arranger?"

"Often have I wept in secret for thy sufferings, Augusta," said Obarton.

She shrugged her fine shoulders. "But thou canst not know all, Arranger. We talk now in deep secret. Know now that once, in despair, I of-

fered myself as wife to Attila the Hun—secretly!"

"The Scourge of God!"* Obarton felt a chill pass up his spine at the sound of the hated name.

"To escape my exile! He disdained me then. . . . Now he hath sent to Rome demanding me—and the Emperor, my brother, and my mother, the Empress Placidia, are deeply affronted at the insolence of this barbarian. They will refuse him, and there will be bitter war. He will bring his hordes to the very gates of Rome. Obarton, they must never know that I once offered to wed Attila!"

"He will tell them!" said Obarton. "Nay—if he is dead, how then can he tell them?"

"But he is not dead!"

*Some say that Tamerlane was the Scourge of God. The truth is that both were. Each murdered about the same number of millions of ordinary folks.

—Bertram.

"I know," cooed the Princess. "That is why I sent for thee, Obarton. Thou advertisest thyself as an Arranger, dost thou not?"

Obarton admitted it, reluctantly.

"As an Arranger, thou understandest the peradventures of life and the distant goal of life which is death, dost thou not? Thou hast been commended to me as one who, for a price, can arrange all things. Thou art familiar with the arts of the assassin, the crafts of the bravo, the dark byways of the killers. At a price! At a price! And thou shalt receive such a price as neither thou nor any such Arranger as thou art hath ever known, if thou canst but arrange for me the end of this Hunnish wolf before he comes to Rome to take me—and mine!"

"Gods! But it is to kill the conqueror of all Europe!"

"And all Europe will thank thee on its knees."

"Oh, Princess, this thing I must consider well! Give me time!"

"Time! Time! There is a bitter limit to the time—as there is no limit to the reward. Go! Think! Be swift! Come back when thou art prepared! Unlock the door—call my treasurer! Thou canst not think without gold. It is ready for thee—an abundance. . . . Succeed in this mission, Obarton, and I will enrich thee, and"—her eyes flashed above a brilliant smile—"thou shalt be forever established in my favor!"

Obarton bowed, and unlocked the door. After all, he was a man of business—rough or smooth. And this talk of cash in advance was as minstrelsy to his ear. About being established in her favor later on, he was not so sure. She was very beautiful after her fashion—but so is a sleek young tigress, after hers.

To this day, the name of Attila reeks in the nostrils of all right-minded men—though not perhaps so intensely as Attila did personally in the days of Valentinian. He was one of the first of the super-killers; and like most of these, he was extravagantly well guarded.

It only took the gold-gorged Obarton a few seconds to realize that he had accepted from the Princess Honoria a commission that was worth a big fee. A little further reflection convinced him that he had undertaken to perform a very considerable miracle—one which literally millions of men before him had failed to perform. But having accepted it, he had to do something about it, or return Honoria's money—an expedient which never had been and was extremely unlikely ever to become a part of his business method.

"Huh!" he said to himself over a goblet of old vintage Falernian that evening. "Often have I longed to be

in the Big Money! Now I am in it. But by the gods, I could find it within me to wish I were out of it!"

But a few more goblets cheered him up a little. He took a look at himself in a burnished silver mirror. Even as the promising Princess had said, he was a singularly seemly Arranger. If he had lived in these days, he almost certainly would have been functioning at Hollywood. But Hollywood was so much a thing of the far future that it might just as well have been a thing of the far past.

Another goblet convinced him that after all, there was something to be said for a vista in which he saw himself as an established favorite of the sister of the Emperor Valentinian—who was fond of her, and now that the Empress Placidia was getting older and much less influential and formidable, was able to do for her anything in reason that she wanted done. Money would cease to matter. The arranging business could be sold and forgotten. Yes, definitely a prospect.

"But thou canst not know all, Arranger."



He sent for one of the few men he could trust.* This was Bullo, who in his day had personally conducted a big business as a professional murderer. For years he had been the best and most highly paid bravo in Rome, but growing old and careless, he had so grossly mismanaged a commission to exterminate a well-known Goth, that when by sheer luck he managed to crawl into the darkness out of reach of the annoyed Goth, he left about thirty-two and a half per cent of his working parts behind him. Bullo had then retired from active business,

*In those cheerful days you had to know a man about twenty years, as well as have a hold on him, before you trusted him. Then he probably double-crossed you. . . . Brutus, a patrician of ancient Rome, in his little volume of memoirs "Looking Back at It All," agrees with me, though he was not a man I, personally, would trust. —*Bertram.*

though he still did a little as a Consulting Murderer, and had established himself as a competent Professor of Poisons. He still had brains in his head (the Goth must have overlooked these) and, of course, enormous experience.

Obarton sent for him on the off chance that Bullo, a notorious Hun-hater, might stew up an idea. Bullo, fresh from his favorite tavern, was in a talkative mood when he lurched over to Obarton's place, and he was more so before he had had a couple of the unwatered Falernian wine the Arranger plentifully provided. But even so, he was not really enthusiastic.

"Mark ye, Obarton: it is a difficult and complicated technique. None but a genius with a desire to perform suicide would undertake the extinction of Attila. For myself, I—yea, even I, Bullo—have invariably refused all offers to subtract Attila from the total Hun population. His body-

guard is what any ordinary king would describe as an army; and he himself is as cunning as a wolf, as savage as a wild bull and as quick to strike as a snake—quicker, indeed, for snakes, in my experience, are slow in the strike and their timing is bad. I never used them except in cheap cases, when the out-of-pocket expenses had to be kept low. Moreover, the Hun king is a wizard with horses—he liveth his life on horseback; and it is said that each one of his horses is trained to kick backward with the hind legs or punch forward with the front legs, at a touch. With their teeth, they are taught to snap like a rat-trap—but quicker.

"Nay, Obarton, leave well alone. It is less a contract for a man than a woman; for, mark ye well, it is conceivable that there may be moments when he will relax in company with a woman, but in the company of no man hath he ever been known to lay



"Ye have come at a good time," Manour declared. "My master taketh another bride."

aside his caution. They say that ever his pig-eyes rove from face to face of even his favorite generals. . . . Nay, leave well alone, Obarton!"

Bullo downed a goblet.

"Or if thou art set upon it, remember these words of Bullo—yea, I, Bullo himself, who speaketh unto thee: 'Never lived the man who was match for the women of his life. For, observe it well, Obarton, one man is one life, but within his one life are many women. They loom in the orbit of his one life like a multitude of blossoms,* and though he may pluck them by the myriad, yet always in the end one of them shall pluck him!' Therefore"—Bullo passed his goblet for replenishment—"let us seek among the fair ones in Attila's life for the one who shall forever finish it. And the sooner, the better."

"Thou art a philosopher—of a kind—I perceive," said Obarton sourly. Nevertheless he was attracted by Bullo's reasoning, and began to talk in terms of money—cold money down, and quite a lot of it.

"I shall not offend thee, good Bullo, if I say that thy business is of a more popular grade than mine. Mine is

*True—of that period. They were a polygamous lot. Things would have changed a good deal since then, I take it.

—Bertram.

more exclusive, and my fees are vastly in excess of thine. Therefore thou hast to do with the many, whereas I do with the few. Inquire discreetly among thy cutthroat clientèle—as the Franks say—concerning possibilities. Here is gold, and mark ye well, my Bullo, there is plenty more where that came from!"

Bullo's eyes glittered glassily.

"I will do my best, Obarton—and my best is very good indeed!"

LATER, by a week or so, quite a little company of men and horses under Obarton's command, with Bullo coming a good second in command, were heading for the so-called palace of Attila on the banks of the Danube.

The men of this expedition were moderate and not more heavily armed than the average workmen of the period, but the horses were superb—Arabs, and good ones.

It was an excellent idea, for it was about the only way in which Obarton & Co. could hope to get anywhere near Attila; his legions of toughs swarmed, miles deep, around his headquarters, and every man of them was a horse-master—had lived on horseback, and on the horses, too, from childhood. Their favorite roast was a haunch of horse; their favorite entrée was a species of soufflé of horses' blood and herbs; their favorite drink was fermented mares' milk. All other food was about as attractive to them as a

bale of asparagus is to a man-eating tiger, or a strawberry shortcake is to a famished vampire bat. So eclipsed of horses was the mental horizon of the blood-hungry Huns, that the leading Roman scientists of the day maintained that it was a grave oversight of Nature not to have made a thorough job of it, and had them born as horses in the first place. Or at least, as jackasses. They would have been less bloodthirsty, and enjoyed life more.

Bullo had brought him from the underworld a rumor upon which—for lack of anything better—Obarton had

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering

gambled. And when they were but one day's journey from Attila's H.Q., this rumor was confirmed.

They pulled in at a biggish farm which was obviously that of a horse-raiser, and were greeted by the owner of the ranch,—a seriously battered but still good-looking gentleman on crutches,—one Stylo, who might have been a gypsy before he settled down to work. He was young, and clad in many colors, and had a slight acquaintance with Bullo, who promptly introduced Obarton and produced wineskins.

Stylo invited them to eat with him.

Long before the meal was over and the frequently renewed supply of wineskins was exhausted, they were talking both freely and frankly.

"Thou hast suffered an accident recently, Stylo," said Obarton, as he tilted a wineskin for his battered host.

"Aye, Obarton, that have I—at the hands of one of Attila's captains, Dagga, a man like a bear. My foot slipped at a critical moment, or it would have been otherwise—he would have qualified for the crutches. Doubtless it was the will of the gods, and my unlucky day. But when I am healed up, we shall meet again!" said Stylo, his eyes grim.

"It was a private quarrel?" asked Obarton politely.

"If to leave a man for dead and to abduct his betrothed can be called a quarrel, it was," snarled Stylo. "That was the way of it, look you. In two days' time Ildica, the loveliest woman in the world, would have been my wife. But I was not the only one who appreciated her charms. This raider, this Hun woman-stealer, appreciated her also, and as is their way, he came here with another like him, and took us by surprise. Me they left for dead; Ildica they bore away! Rumor hath come to me since that evil day that it was not because he coveted her that Dagga came—but because of a hint

let fall by none other than Attila the Hun king himself, who had seen her while riding one day."

"Attila! Gods! Then there is no hope?" exclaimed Bullo.

Stylo eyed him doubly.

"While there is life, there is at least hope—of death—somebody's!" he said, with a note under-running his voice which would have startled anyone less hard-boiled than Obarton and partner. "For, mark ye well, friends, Ildica is no witless bird of Paradise! Nay, she is supple and fierce and cunning; she comes of true gypsy stock; she is like a beautiful, dangerous snake of venomous steel—and it is I, Stylo, who am her heart's desire, as she is mine!" He hissed the last words at them, more than a little snakishly himself.

The Arranger and the murderer exchanged glances, and rose.

"We ourselves are bound for Attila's palace, and it may befall that we have opportunity to speak with her. Who knows?" said Obarton. "Hast any message—or aught to send her, Stylo?"

"Aye, that have I!" The gypsy hobbled to a corner of the apartment and fumbled at a skin bag which lay on a stool. Returning, he gave Obarton several quills, of different colors.

"If thou canst get these quills into her hands, with word that from this hour onward there will for the next six moons be awaiting here, ready to leave in an instant, my fastest horses, then I will give thee this farm and all thereon. More I cannot give, for I have no more!"

Bullo stared at the quills.

"Poisons?"

"Poisons from Egypt!" said Stylo darkly.

"The Egyptian poisons are usually good poisons—I know them all!" observed Bullo.

BUT he spoke otherwise when a little later they rode on.

"Concerning the poisons, Stylo spoke truly," he said. "These Egyptian poisons are good—swift, subtle, portable and inexpensive. Suitable for amateurs. But I do not use them for the better class of case. Most of them are easily diagnosed by a skillful physician. It is otherwise with those I use for my more expensive contracts!"

He chuckled—much as one would expect a diamond-back rattler to chuckle if, indeed, they ever do.*

Obarton did not chuckle. He seemed a little uncomfortable. But he answered civilly enough.

"Thou art famous as a master of thine art, Bullo," he said, his smile a

*Buffon agrees with me that chuckling rattlesnakes are very rare. They have very little to chuckle about. —Bertram.



little forced. "Now, for an example, let us suppose that we have the good fortune to meet with the beautiful Ildica and are able to convey to her hands a—er—form of release for the Hun king, which of thy wide assortment wouldst thou, as a high-class professor or purveyor of sudden death, proffer unto her?"

Again the skin-crawling chuckle from the Professor.

"Without hesitation, just one small pellet of my Arabian Powder No. 2. It is so small that one can hold it invisible between the bases of any two fingers, so that one may drop it unseen where and when one will. It acts like lightning, but it leaves no trace. Moreover, there lives not the physician who can say: 'This person died of Bullo's Arabian Powder No. 2.' And if there were a physician who could, he would not live very long!"

"Hah!" said Obarton. "And how doth this delectable powder act, that it should leave no trace?"

"It bursteth the arteries of whoso taketh," replied Bullo casually—and pulled up abruptly as they were halted by a gang of Hun horsemen.

"Whither goest thou with these horses?" demanded the leader. He had already grabbed the head-ropes of one of the best; and his men, horse-thieves by birth, upbringing and natural inclination, were reaching out for theirs as Obarton's answer rasped out.

"These be horses from the deserts of Arabia, a gift from the great Estyloh, Sheik of Deytvil, unto His Majesty King Attila. Each horse is branded in a secret place with the brand of Great Attila—and it were better for any horsethief that he should slay himself alive, than touch or hinder the passage of these noble beasts to the stables of His Majesty!"

The clutching hands of the Huns fell away as though the halters were white-hot. Even the hard-boiled captain of the crew looked scared.

"Pass, pass! In the name of all the gods, pass on!" he growled. "We were

but admiring the noble brutes! Way! Make way, thou swine, there! Way for the King's Arabians!"

Nobody else hindered them—for Attila was notoriously rough with people who interfered with his horses.

ALL went well—far better, indeed, than Obarton had expected. Attila was away deleting a town (and its inhabitants) which had offended him. He would return that afternoon in time for the quick ceremony which would add Ildica to his already extensive list of wives. Most of the swarming Huns were already half-drunk in anticipation of the festivities. They would be unconscious by the time the brief marriage ceremonies were completed.

The Arab horses were the subject of great admiration, and Obarton & Co. were welcomed. Apartments in the so-called palace were reserved for them, and they did a good deal of drinking with Manour, the ancient bowlegged tough who called himself Master of the King's Horse. Manour had tried a few of the Arab horses, and was enraptured.

"It is not riding—it is dreaming!" he said, which was pretty fair for a Hun. They were drinking late, and Manour was getting confidential.

"There is nothing that my master will not do for ye for so good a gift," he declared. "Ye have come at a good time, moreover; for within a few hours of his return, he taketh another bride! There will be great festivities!"

"A bride! Hath the Princess Honoria arrived?" asked Obarton. "I knew not that—"

"Nay, nay—not the Princess Honorial! That is a great affair—an alliance which must be the matter of negotiation between kings. It is true that these are afoot, but the marriage of which I speak is a matter of less import! It is a girl, Ildica, who hath caught the King's taste and fancy. She will do well enough until the alliance with the sister of the Roman Emperor is made."

Manour laughed, and drank again.

"One more or less—what matter?"

"I have heard that Ildica is surpassingly beautiful," said Obarton. "Would that I could see her!"

"That can be arranged—at a price," said Manour. "Inscribe on thy parchments that the chestnut mare with the white near foreleg is designed as a gift for the King's Master of Horse, and I doubt not that I can persuade Ildica to come hither to speak with thee."

"That will I do, for thou art a man after mine own heart! Good Bullo, pass me the parchment of the horses!"

Bullo, who was picking his teeth lightly—very lightly indeed—with one of the colored quills, made haste to oblige.

Obarton wrote, Manour peering over his shoulder at the words he could not read.

"That maketh the chestnut mare mine, subject to Attila's approval?"

"Undoubtedly!" swore Obarton.

"Good—I go. Thou shalt see the bride!"

He went out.

Bullo leaped into activity. Moving like a conjuror, he filled Manour's drinking horn, added a little something to it, and set it back. Obarton watched the Professor engaged on his business with a comradely interest.

"There is that within the draft which will clout him senseless in a space of seconds," hissed Bullo. "Drink to the bride, Obarton, as swiftly as good manners will permit!"

OBARTON nodded—wiping a sudden cold sweat from his brow.

"Gods! If Attila but knew, he would crucify us, having first removed and burnt our hides!"

He pulled himself together and filled his drinking horn personally—leaving Bullo to fill his own.

"Thou hast the quills, Bullo?"

"Nay; she will not need the cheap Egyptian stuff. I shall furnish her with the best—*mine own*!" hissed Bullo, and lolled back as there entered to them a magnificent brunette, tall, lithe, graceful, vivid, with great black eyes that gleamed with a lambent and perilous light—Ildica, Attila's most recent prey. . . . Behind her lurched the Master of Horse.

Obarton and Bullo bowed low before her.

"Thou art the men with the Arabians sent as gift to the King by the Sheik Estyloh!" she said. But she pronounced "*Estyloh*" as if there were little or no "*E*" in it—so that it sounded almost like "*Stylo*."

Obarton knew then that she was indeed swift and subtle as Stylo, her "heart's desire," had said.

"Even so," he said. "From Estyloh!" He too muted the "*E*." Then he took his drinking horn.

"Permit that we drink to the most beautiful bride-to-be of the Great Attila—thou, Bullo; thou, Manour; and I, Obarton!"

They drank—and Manour dropped like a poleaxed ox.

Leaving him to lie, they worked fast then.

"We are from Stylo—of the farm. Trust us, Ildica."

Bullo passed her a tiny pill.

"Listen! Here are pellets! Drop one of these into the cup of wine which thou wilt proffer the tyrant when he comes to thee after the carouse on his wedding night—and flee. We shall await thee with horses at the back of the palace; fear not—all the guards will be drunk! Dost understand? Quick!"



She was quick—the quill vanished. Bullo held a vial under the nostrils of Manour, and the man gave a violent shudder, opening his eyes instantly. His head rolled on the white arm of the woman.

"Awake, Manour!" she said in a dove-gentle voice.

Manour awoke.

"Drink this! Thou hast been—overcome. A passing thing, Manour—it passes! Already thou art thyself again!" crooned Bullo.

Manour drained the cup Bullo proffered—and was himself (such as he was) again.

"It was a sudden dizziness," he admitted.

"Yea—a dizziness," said Ildica; and she left them, quickly, with no more than a flash of her great eyes at the emissaries of "*Estyloh*."

"Thy dizziness hath now gone, Manour?" inquired Obarton anxiously.

"Yea? Glad am I—though thine indisposition cost us dear, for it decomposed the beautiful Ildica, and we had no more than a glimpse of her. No matter. Thou art truly thyself again, Manour? Ah, that is good! One cup—then rest awhile!"

"So far, Bullo—good!" breathed Obarton as Manour reeled out.

"We have made it good—so far," answered Bullo.

An hour later, at dusk, Attila and his swarm of killers, drunk with fire, murder, outrage and rapine, raged home.

Obarton and Bullo looked out from a window on the town-destroyers as they came in; and they did not like what they saw in the red and smoky glow of many torches.

"Head-hunters and scalpers, I see!" said Obarton in a whisper as they stared out at the shouting mob of horsemen milling about the great square before the palace. "May the gods forever keep them out of Rome!"

"Cold steel for that," grunted the Consulting Professor of Poisons. "The gods aid only those who aid themselves! Cold steel—or better still, that which I carry in my pouches! Given my way and a reasonable sum, I could lay them stiff as ra—"

He broke off as Manour entered, to report that Attila would view the Arabs in the morning. Meantime Obarton and Bullo, envoys of the Sheik, were invited to the wedding feast. The ceremony—quite a brief one—was even now taking place; and—they would not forget the matter of the chestnut mare with the white foreleg?

"Fear not, Manour—she shall be thine," said Obarton. "Come what may, she shall be thine." He had to raise his voice to make himself heard above the yelling devils in the square outside—who had already overslaked their thirst after their long ride, and were now shouting their besotted approval of the marriage.

"They would shout as loudly if it were a burial!" said Obarton, staring out.

Bullo's wide, thin-lipped viper mouth moved.

"That too they may be shouting for ere many hours have sped!" he said in a malevolent whisper. "Gods! How they swell! I have seen nothing in our saturnalia so swinelike. Would that the Emperor ordered *me* to deal with these Huns, and furnished me the gold to get the simple things I needed! I would carpet this region—nay, this whole land—with a carpet of dead Huns such as the eye of man hath never seen!"

The eyes of the Professor of Poisons were glittering with a strange and sinister lust.

"Peace! Peace!" soothed Obarton unceasingly. "One thing at a time, comrade!"

They waited, staring out, till a sudden roar arose outside.

"The ceremony is over—such as it was!" he said.

Bullo nodded impatiently.

"We go now?"

"Nay—Manour will return to conduct us!" said Obarton, staring out. "Saw ye ever the like, Bullo?"

AS far as the eye could reach flared torches and fires of the Huns. The night was wild with flame, delirious with shoutings of men, the neighing of horses; and the red gloom reeked with the odor of half-burnt horseflesh. Here and there slaves tottered under the vast weight of drink looted from a thousand ruined towns.

"And *this* no more than Hunnish revelry!" said Obarton, a fastidious if not a moral man.

"Bah! Would I were butler this night to them all!" deplored the Professor at his elbow.

Then Manour entered—half drunk, but civil.

"He is in a good mood, and is desirous to see ye," said the Master of Horse. "Be restrained—flatter him—bend well the knee—be humble and, above all things, flatter him!"

They nodded, smiling at the ignorance which hinted to a Roman of the value of flattery!

"And forget not the chestnut mare!" muttered Manour.

THEY made no mistakes when presently the Master of Horse presented them to the Moloch of those days and his bride.

Inflamed by many things as he already was—including Ildica, brilliant at his side—Attila was still capable of a little further inflammation by Manour, who described the Arabs as an introductory to the presentation. The bowlegged old ruffian knew how to describe horses, and the bloodshot blackguard at the head of the long tables knew how to appreciate them.

"It is good. Tomorrow we will try these horses. If they are all that our Master of Horse claimeth, I will enrich thee so that ye can fetch me yet more of them. And now, drink and feast and make merry, envoys, for ye have come at a good hour!"

Manour steered them to seats among the Hun generals not far from Attila—and the feast was on. It was not much of a feast for Romans, but it seemed a treat for the Huns.

Obarton and Bullo were careful at first, but they soon perceived that care would not long be necessary, for nobody was noticing them an hour after the feast began. Attila was little better than the rest of his "court."

At last Obarton and his lethal friend saw Attila, a short, thick, swarthy brute, attempt to rise, and aided by Ildica's strong white arms, succeed. He glared about him with glassy, bloodshot eyes, the veins on his temples standing out like ropes, his wet lip-corners dragging down, but his whirling mind could discover no cause of offense among the multitude of sots, and so he allowed Ildica and another to assist him away.

The eyes of Ildica flickered over the crowd and lingered for a second on the two Romans. Then she was gone.

They waited a little, seeming to drink. All around them the Huns were dropping like ripe berries, and they saw that they could go without attracting attention.

So, each with an arm around the other, hoarsely howling an entirely meaningless song, they reeled out....

Throughout all that remained of the night their luck held—or they held it.

And Ildica's luck held.

Indeed, the luck of the Europe of that day held—or was held for her by these three people, some Arab horses and a few horsemen.

But the luck of Attila the Hun king ran out forever that night....

By the time the Hun guards, uneasy at the overlong silence in Attila's bridal chamber, dared to break in next

afternoon, Ildica and Stylo were in the remote glooms of a distant forest among the gypsies from whom they originally came.

And Obarton and Bullo the Poisoner were racing for Rome....

The Princess Honoria was lying fretfully on her couch, well sheltered from the intense glare of the sun outside, when her favorite eunuch ventured to announce that Obarton the Arranger was awaiting audience.

"Bring him forthwith," she said.

Her eyes gleamed as the Arranger came in.

"Draw nigh!" she said in a low voice. "Nay, closer!"

Her voice sank to a whisper.

"Thou hast come to report! Hast thou aught to report, Arranger? I have fretted bitterly through the long nights, the dreary days, lacking word from thee, silencing mine ears to the myriad rumors that wheel about the city like the pigeons of the air! The eyes of the Empress Placidia are dark with menace; the eyes of the Emperor, my brother, are full of boding, and rumor follows rumor. It is said that Attila draweth in his armies about him to march on Rome and take me at the sword's point! It is said that he hath sent envoys to Rome charged with tales to my discredit! Lies—lies—lies—they crawl the streets like asps! It is said that they have sent for the pallid virgins of the court of Theodosius among whom I languished so long—that these may bear witness against me! Lies—asps! Tell me!"

She sat up suddenly, thrusting out a bare arm, to grip with jeweled and lovely fingers the wrist of Obarton.

"Tell me! Hast thou done aught for me?"

Her eyes were blazing.

"Tell me, I say! What hast thou done for me?"

Like one fascinated, she watched a slow smile dawn on the cruel, handsome face of the Arranger.

"Forget forever thy fears, thou beautiful one!" said Obarton, softly, leaning to her. "Attila is dead—dead—of a burst artery! This I swear—for I contrived it!"



She drew her breath in a sigh so long that it was as though it could never cease. But at last she returned the smile of Obarton.

"I believe thee, Obarton, thou most seemly of men!"

She relaxed, thinking. Her lids fell, as if she were about to sleep.

Obarton the Arranger waited. Then a whisper—

"Draw close the curtains—close; turn the key in the lock of the door. Speak low, Obarton. I wish to talk to thee—"

He went over to draw the curtains, and as he glanced triumphantly over the city, the rays of the afternoon sun struck upon his eyes with such an intolerable brilliance that he shut them for a second. The curtains swished together, but did not altogether shut out the light.

He opened his eyes again—on Mr. Hobart Honey's electric fire in Twentieth Century London. It was glowing nicely.

So was Mr. Honey.

The Lama's pill had short-circuited just once more—that was all.

FOR a long time Mr. Honey stared at the electric fire. Then he poured himself a port.

"Pity!" he said. "Though perhaps it was just as well. I wonder how it finished. No need to wonder, really. Can guess for myself; men like me—like I was—usually came to a pretty uncouth finish in those days. Yes, better off as I am—in a way. Though she certainly *was* a very attractive woman!"



Another of Mr. Honey's extraordinary adventures in transmigration will appear in an early issue.

THIS



The Story Thus Far:

"**A**HEAD off starboard quarter," Prebley's bombardier-observer Slater exclaimed. "Looks like a torpedoing job going on!"

The Devastator was too late to save the stricken freighter; but they had an extraordinary piece of luck, for the attacking submarine showed its conning tower, and Prebley gave Slater a chance to bomb and destroy the enemy with their own torpedo.

Yet as they winged back to the carrier *Bennington*, shepherding a convoy on the stormy road to Murmansk, Ensign Prebley was too troubled in mind to share Slater's exultation. For he had only that morning confirmed his surmise that Commander Ranford, the Air Officer of the *Bennington*, was his own estranged father.

This situation had come about in curious fashion: Ranford had married during World War I, wherein he had already made a brilliant record as a Navy pilot. His wife, however, had utilized family influence to have her husband transferred to a shore job. He felt that she had thus ruined his career, and as a consequence they had separated. He had resigned from the Navy; but his record had re-won him a commission when hostilities again threatened. She had brought up her boy alone; and he had used her family name Prebley rather than his father's.

Another thing worried Prebley: That morning, just as another Devastator plane was landing on the carrier, the 'midships elevator was lowered, with the result that the plane was damaged and the pilot injured.

Later that day, the plane piloted by Prebley sank a submarine; but his crew was disappointed by Commander Ranford's casual acceptance of their success. As Prebley and his pal Tod Moresby stood at the rail that night, Tod was struck down inexplicably; the Executive Officer, Bloxham, was also slugged while making investigations. The weapon seemed to be a leaden weight tied to the end of a heavy cord; and a weight of that type was discovered in Prebley's bunk, hidden under a pillow. But who had wielded it—and why? Prebley was suspicious of one Swayle, Commander Ranford's "writer"; too, there was the pilot Du Laigne, whom Prebley did not trust—but there was no discernible motive for subversive actions on the part of either man.

Confused and worried, Ensign Prebley joined his co-pilots topside next morning to observe practice landings made by the Grumman Wildcats. The weather was heavy, and after two men had smashed up while trying to land despite the fury of wind and water, Ranford himself, to the amazement of all observers, took off, circled and managed to land, though with difficulty. Brusquely he ordered the Signal Officer, regarding the rest of the flight: "Flag them ashore. We won't risk any more." (*The story continues in detail:*)

EDDIE PREBLEY went below after watching the fighters reform above and turn westward for the New England coast. He mucked up again for the Communications Officer's lecture,

and then ran along to the sickbay to see Tod.

Moresby was sitting up in a heavy flannel suit of pajamas. He sported a skull bandage, and a black eye.

"What are they all practicing for out there?" he asked as Prebley entered. "We got an entertainment on?"

"I don't get it," Eddie answered, puzzled. "We've been having a beaut of a line-squall. Couldn't get the fighters back."

"Everyone who goes along the campaignway is either singing or whistling. What cooks?"

"They should! We really had a show up there. The Air Officer watched Deerfield and Rippy Hastings pile up trying to get in, so he simply ordered a Wildcat out, took off and put her back on deck again. Baby, was it a show!"

"I saw them bring Deerfield in and swab him off. He was pretty burned up about being sent off. But don't tell me the wings some of these Gold Braid birds have up mean anything! I thought they just came with the uniform!"

"Boy! This is a man's Navy!" Prebley retorted. "The Commander took off, clawed for a chunk of altitude, spun down and came in out of the spin, just like nothing!"

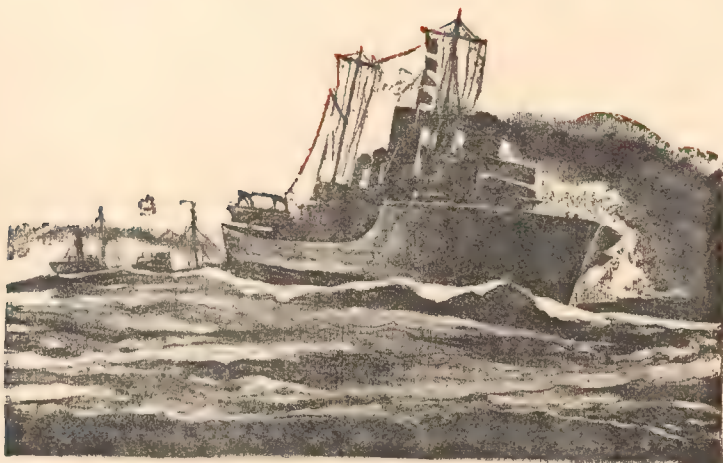
"But he sends the fighters back because it is too tough?"

"That's what he figured. Still, we cracked up two as it was. Anything on Hastings?"

"I heard the M. O. talking about him. They have him aboard the 356—rights reserved."

IS IT, PILOT!

A carrier on convoy duty to Murmansk, fights the enemy aloft, at sea and—aboard.



by Arch
Whitehouse

Illustrated by
GRATTAN CONDON

I think that's the *Potter*. Pretty well banged up, I guess, with a broken leg to boot," Tod said glumly. "You know, Prebley, this trip's really dishing out the wound-stripes. We haven't spotted the convoy yet, and look at the length of the binnacle list!"

"Commander Bloxham—how's he?"

"All right, I guess. They took him back to his quarters," Tod said disparagingly. "But how come those guys were sent off this morning? Doesn't anyone read a weather report up there?"

"They can fool you," said Eddie, deferring the bridge.

"What are we down for today?"

"A lecture on convoy silhouettes. They're going to tell us how to pick a tanker out from a two-well freighter. You're lucky. You can duck it. How are you feeling, anyway?"

"Just as if I'd walked into a prop. Who smacked me, anyhow?"

"Some guy with a nice large chunk of lead hanging from a length of plumb-bob cord. He must have been aloft—on the flight-deck, or hiding in the catwalk. We figured that from a cord burn along Bloxham's chin."

"We?"

"I had a talk with Commander Ranford early this morning. He has the same idea."

"You two getting cozy again?"

"Hardly. He was giving me the needle for speaking out of turn. You ask the orderly," Prebley said quickly. He had decided not to mention the fact that he was to be a luncheon guest in the Air Officer's stateroom.

"Well, why did this guy with the plumb-bob pick on me?"

"He didn't. It could have been me, had I been leaning over the rail."

"I get it. Someone's just stirring a stink. Well—they're doing all right, so far."

"I'll be seeing you," Prebley said, breaking it off. "Later in the afternoon. Anything I can get you?"

"Sure! A discharge from this castor-oil cabin. All I got is a headache—and howl!"

"The way we're slugging it out, you'll be out quicker than you think. Sit snug, you dope."

THE *Bennington* fought the storm and swung into her Great Circle course, plunging on through the blustering tempest which still rolled the massive aircraft-carrier and crashed wave after wave against the resounding bulwarks of her hull. The duty personnel topside were bundled in heavy coats and slickers.

The spray and spindrift from the swelling rollers clambering over the bow pelted in savage scatter-shot effect at the ramparts of the superstructure.

The Marine on guard on the bridge wing saluted and gave Ensign Prebley a questioning glance. Eddie went inside and saw Swayle at a desk hurriedly stacking a sheaf of papers, evidently preparing to leave so that the table could be set for luncheon.

"Good morning, sir," he greeted. "Commander Ranford will be up from the navigation-room shortly. He left word for you to make yourself

comfortable. Quite a show the Commander put on, eh?"

"Quite a show," agreed Prebley, sitting down in a comfortable chair near a long bookcase. He felt that this man was probing for something, and was uncomfortable in Swayle's presence. He tried to analyze his own feelings, wondering whether he was being unfair. He would have liked to question Swayle, but knew such a measure was beyond his jurisdiction.

"Well, make yourself comfortable, sir," Swayle said pleasantly. "I believe you're having lunch here *this* time."

"That's right," Prebley answered, catching the direct inference.

"I believe we're picking up the convoy in a few hours," Swayle added as he straightened his wad of papers and started for the door.

"Oh? I hadn't heard. You get the information quicker up here, of course."

Swayle turned with a puzzled look. "I thought it was general—about the vessel, sir."

"That's all right. I just hadn't heard. I've been visiting Ensign Moresby in the sickbay."

"Oh, yes. He's coming along fine, isn't he? Queer business, that, eh?"

"It gives a guy an awful headache," Prebley said, cutting off the conversation.

"Yes sir," agreed Swayle, leaving with another hesitant glance.

Once the door was closed, Prebley took time to glance around the comfortable but frugally furnished cabin. He looked about, hoping to discover

a picture of his mother or some evidence of the association. He ran his eyes over the row of books that filled the shelves and reached up for a travel-worn volume titled "Navy Year Book—1917."

He noted on the flyleaf that it was the property of Lieut. E. A. Ranford, U.S.N. There was a small indistinct price-mark penciled in an upper corner, and the pasted-in label of a Boston book store.

"I wonder." Eddie flipped the pages, illustrated with basket-mast battleships, seamen in blue woolen skull-caps, and admirals wearing strange-looking service jackets that seemed sizes too small. He came upon a full-page picture of a slim smiling man which made him sit up. The resemblance hit him at once, and a warm glow was pumped through him as he realized that in his youth Commander Ranford had looked astonishingly like one Ensign Prebley.

On the opposite page was printed the details of the citation that had accompanied Lieutenant Ranford's Navy Cross. There was a photographic illustration of the medal, and further information on Ranford's service record.

For gallantry and devotion . . . above and beyond the call of duty . . . in that while carrying out a scout patrol over the North Sea Lieutenant Ranford sighted and attacked a German seaplane which was attempting to bomb a disabled U.S. Navy submarine. Although Lieutenant Ranford attacked tenaciously until he had spent all of his ammunition, the German aircraft continued to threaten the submarine. Finally, with utter disregard for his own safety, Lieutenant Ranford deliberately rammed the tail of the German seaplane and caused it to descend out of control and crash into the sea. By good fortune and masterful skill, Lieutenant Ranford brought his disabled plane down and made an emergency landing on the water, and in turn was rescued by the crew of the submarine.

"Holy smokel!" ejaculated Eddie reading the citation over again. "I thought they only pulled stuff like that in stories!"

HE flipped the pages of the volume further, hoping that he might find more evidence of Commander Ranford's World War career. The rest was routine, however; and he had just slipped the book back in its place on the shelf as the A. O. came in.

"Ah, Prebley," he greeted. "Don't get up."

"Thank you, sir," Eddie stood up, nevertheless. "I have been snooping, sir. Your citation in the Navy Year Book here. I—I didn't know. Mother never told me."

"Ancient history," Ranford smiled, and Eddie found himself warming to the man again. "That's the blind fear of youth, you know, Prebley. They like to call it gallantry. But it's fear. I was so afraid that Jerry would get the sub, I lost all sense of proportion—and rammed him."

"Is that what it feels like, sir?"

"Absolutely! There is no such thing as bravery, remember. What we call courage is simply the normal reaction to fear. When they picked me up, I was hysterical and blubbering like a prep-school bully. I was afraid I'd drown, and I screamed for them to come and get me. Afterward, Sims—he was Admiral of the Fleet at the time—told me that was why he'd signed the recommendation for the decoration. He said I deserved a reward for making the most of what training I had received. I think he understood what I had experienced."

"I can't tell you how much today meant to me, sir."

"Today?"

"I mean your show on the flight-deck. You must have maintained your ticket—somewhere."

"Again a reaction to absolute fright, Prebley. I was afraid I'd made a mistake in sending them off. I had to show them that at least I could get back on—even though a mistake had been made."

"Mistake, sir?"

"Oh, here's the steward. Set the table for two, will you, steward? Ensign Prebley will take lunch with me."

The steward nodded, and stared at Eddie as though he were trying to remember where he'd seen him before.

"And while we're waiting, I'd like you to look over this weather report, Prebley. Look it over carefully, will you? I have a few signals to sign here."

Prebley took the sheet of paper. It was an ordinary Naval weather form, filled in by the staff on duty in the Navigation Cabin. It carried the date and time of compilation. Figures of temperature, dew-point, direction and strength of wind and the various standard symbols to indicate barometric pressure and information showing the characteristic barometric tendency during the previous three-hour period.

Reading it over, Prebley interpreted the data to indicate that there had been a slight change in temperature which could be accounted for by their continued run north. Cloud-conditions disclosed that there might be scattered squall conditions. From these details Prebley instinctively turned to the barometric data.

At first he noticed that the tendency was toward a rising barometer, which indicated promised better weather. There was a straight 45-degree angled line running up from the lower left-hand corner of its square to the upper

right-hand corner. He pondered on that, and then noticed a slight roughness in the square. He fingered it, and came to the conclusion that an erasure had been made there, and quite possibly the direction of the indicating line had been changed. He allowed his eyes to move over to the actual barometric figures and decided that they had also been changed.

FOR a minute or two the full significance of the data did not strike, but gradually he realized that had the little line been switched to indicate a rising barometer, it would have a great deal to do with the Air Officer's decision to send the fighter patrol off this morning.

Commander Ranford came over and looked over his shoulder. "Notice anything, Prebley?"

Eddie did not answer, but simply pointed to the faint traces of erasure and looked up. The Commander was wearing a pair of horn-rimmed glasses. Eddie hadn't noticed the A. O. using glasses before.

"Right! And if I had been using these this morning, I'm sure I would have made a different decision."

Prebley watched the movements of the steward, and waited until he had left the stateroom.

"These points were changed after they left the Nav. Office?" he inquired with a puzzled frown.

"That C.P.O. pilot in your outfit, Du Laigne, took the report from Lieutenant Colvin—in the Nav. Office. What he was doing up there on the bridge at that time of morning, I have no idea. Anyway, he brought the report to Swayle, who was also about. Swayle brought it in to me, and I glanced over it, saw we had a rising glass and risked the reports of *cumulonimbus* clouds received from a Coast Guard boat well east of Cape Sable."

"But actually you had a falling barometer, sir!"

"Correct! Now who made the change—and why?"

"Either Du Laigne or Swayle, I'd say."

"But Du Laigne, being a pilot, could read the report quicker and interpret it in the few short strides from the Nav. Office to Swayle's quarters. I don't know how much Swayle knows about meteorology, but he had about the same amount of time and opportunity to make the change."

"In other words, sir, you can't pin it on either of them."

"It will be very hard. . . . But we have methods, Prebley."

They moved up to the table and began on the soup. They talked around the situation while the steward was present.

"I understand we're picking up the convoy in a few hours, sir," Prebley began again.

Commander Ranford looked up from a cutlet, put his knife and fork down deliberately and said: "Yes? Where did you get that?"

"Swayle mentioned it when I came in."

"Swayle? Queer! We hadn't made it general news yet. I had hoped—I'm not taking more chances on anything, please remember."

"I'm sorry, sir. I shall, of course, keep the confidence."

The steward cleared the table and they moved away and sat on either side of a small coffee-table with a silver pot and cups flanking an open cigarette chest.

"Queer, all this, isn't it?" Ranford said, packing a knobby briar with a pungent dark-colored mixture. He flipped a signal to the steward, got his pipe to draw and waited until they were alone again. Outside, the wind still wailed and there was plenty of movement to the loose objects in the cabin. "I mean to say, your being here in my cabin, like this."

"I've been wondering about that, sir," Prebley said, looking up into his father's face.

"Your mother never told you much about me?" Commander Ranford asked. "I suppose she had her reasons."

"Whatever happened, sir?"

"They gave me a medal for bravery in the Navy, but I didn't have the guts to accept the responsibility of a family man. I was a headliner in those days. 'Rammer Ranford' they called me. We were married at the height of the military-social season in Washington. Oh, yes, we loved one another, but— We have a term for it today: I just couldn't take it."

Ranford leaned over his elbows on his widespread knees, fondling the warm bowl of his pipe. Eddie noticed that the shadows below the eyes and around the mouth seemed to have deepened with the minutes.

"I think I can understand—some of it, sir. I've had a taste of that sort of thing ashore. I mean to say—you can't dodge some of it. Furloughs and the adulation of the service clubs. We photograph well, but we always make certain we stand so that our wings appear. Even the seamen twist their sleeves so that their 2nd or 3rd Class badges show. Some of us may wear civilian clothes on furlough—but most of us don't. We're still clinging to that bit of glory—glory that someone like you created for us years ago."

"We don't want pretty words here, son. Thanks just the same."

"What did you want me to say, sir?" inquired Eddie.

"I'm not quite sure now. I asked you up here so that I could show you that met. Report. That shows I was making excuses for myself. Bad show, that today of mine. Bad taste. A



"We have reason to believe there's a German pocket-battleship somewhere east of us."

wicked gamble, since I hadn't been on a carrier deck for years. Suppose I had muffed it?"

Eddie Prebley stared at his father. "You hadn't—for years, sir?"

"The last time was—between ourselves, of course—was back in 1929, I think. I hit the island on the old *Lexington* with an old Vought Corsair O2U. That was the climax of a series of what I called misadventures. I resigned after that, and stayed out in the Far East."

"You mean you hadn't flown since 1929?"

"Oh, no. I messed about with an air-line in China. I did some instructing in Singapore. I tried representing a home firm in Australia—and went

bankrupt. All I had left was my pride."

"Which was why you didn't come home," said Eddie with feeling.

"I suppose so. Do you wonder then that I became suspicious after I had experienced all that and found myself being offered this post on the *Bennington*—and found you aboard?"

"Do you think Mother—"

"I'm certain of it now. She played the game the way I had not expected. I tried to believe she was the cause of all my trouble—but on a fair-minded analysis, I know now I alone was to blame. She had nothing to do with it. She played the game, made no attempt to poison your mind against me, and then used what influence the Prebleys had left to get me a berth again. The rest is up to me, eh?"

"You mean she felt that if she could arrange that we should meet—like this—and work together—"

"The rest is up to us," Commander Ranford corrected. . . . "I think that will be all, son."

"Yes sir. Thank you for the lunch. I've enjoyed it."

"Keep up the good work."

"I'll do my best, sir."

"And remember," Ranford added, "I only rammed an old Brandenburg biplane for this bit of ribbon. Already, you've sunk a German submarine."

"I was lucky, sir."

"Good! Stay lucky. We'll need a lot of it before we get to Murmansk."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE *Bennington* picked up her convoy late that afternoon just as the setting sun was welding a scarlet seam between sea and sky. The weather had improved considerably. A chuggy little Canadian corvette came up out of the troughs of the sea, fired a signal-line, passed over a watertight canister of orders and formally turned the convoy over to Captain Tennant, who was designated Escort Commander.

From the corvette's report Captain Tennant learned that seven extra vessels had been hurriedly added to the original convoy list. The report read as follows:

Captain Angus Monroe, R. N.
Area Commodore of Convoy,
Aboard R.C.N. Corvette *Estelle*,
Aug. 4th, 1942.

To Escort Commander
Aboard U.S.S. *Bennington*
At sea.

Report on Convoy N.E. 6.
Submit:

I have the honor to report position of convoy at full strength at Lat. N.—, Long. W.—. Under Admiralty instructions seven extra vessels, *Barina*,

Highgate Castle, Cheyenne, Prince Albert, Actorine, Whitstable Bay and Silver Florin joined convoy in accordance with W/T instructions.

Average convoy speed will be 10½ knots.

On the morning of the 2nd of August a periscope was sighted, two points on the starboard bow of the guide and about two ship-lengths away. Course was altered at once right for the periscope and it disappeared. No torpedo was fired.

Except for recent gale fine weather has been experienced but continue to receive advice on danger of considerable ice drifting into convoy lane. Has been seen as far south as Lat. 52-N.

Night of 3rd August orders were received that the columns were to maintain distances of three cables-lengths apart.

Advise that Greek steamer *Eumæus* is grated only for briquette coal. Master has been advised to spray on oil if convoy speed has to be raised in an emergency.

Your obedient servant,
(Signed) Angus Monroe,
Area Commodore of Convoy.

At Captain Tennant's request the gay signal flags: "Message received. . . Contents understood. . . Good luck," were soon fluttering from the yard of the *Bennington's* tripod mast.

IN a more detailed sheet of orders were the names of convoy skippers who were to act as column leaders, plans for entering the harbor at Murmansk, advice on zigzag tactics to be employed, and at what column distances.

"One hundred nine vessels, four destroyers and three corvettes we're responsible for," Commander Ranford muttered when he had been advised in his stateroom. "To say nothing of the *Bennington*!"

He sat down and studied the formation chart of the vessels in his charge, and noted that they had been set out in four columns. The guide ships were merchant vessels capable of well over thirteen knots. Off on the port and starboard beams, protective destroyer screens had been positioned.

"Two days ago they spotted a periscope," he mused over Captain Tennant's personal report. "The convoy is making just over ten knots. A sub could do fifteen knots surfaced at night, and between six and eight submerged by day, and still keep within striking distance. They can take a chance tonight." He pondered on that, and drew up a message, with the suggestion to Captain Tennant that it be lamped to one of the destroyers:

In the event of torpedo attack, convoy will change course 4 points to starboard.

He added the suggestion that the message be relayed on to the column leaders, who in turn would transfer it to the skippers in their columns. He looked up instinctively for Swayle, who was caught peering over his shoulder at the wad of information and convoy position chart.

"This to the Skipper, at once, Swayle," Commander Ranford said, frowning. "Interesting business, eh?"

"Yes sir. Very interesting."

"By the way, Swayle," the Commander said, creaking his chair around. "Yours is a confidential post, you know. I don't care to have my information discussed with junior officers or any others of the ship's personnel. How did you know we were contacting the convoy late this afternoon?"

"Why, I'm not sure, sir. I suppose it was a general rumor. Didn't Lieutenant-Commander Deerfield say the fighter squadron had spotted them, when he came in, sir?"

"Not to my knowledge. Only the Signal Officer and the Skipper knew of that information. It came in a coded message, and he passed the message on to me personally. As a matter of fact, Deerfield's squadron was sent in another direction entirely."

"Is that so, sir! Any particular reason for that?"

Ranford was completely put off by the man's audacity. Either Swayle was a prize fool who had still to learn his place, or he was taking a very long chance to gain further information.

Leaning back and interlacing his fingers over his middle, Commander Ranford looked up at his writer and said: "I suppose I can tell you, Swayle. For one thing, I believe you're a brave man."

"Thank you, sir."

"I'm placing a grave confidence, of course, but we have every reason to believe there's a German pocket-battleship somewhere east of us. I sent Deerfield out to look for her."

Swayle gave a visible start, and crumpled the message-form in his tenuous fingers. Ranford caught it but went on:

"The British may intercept her, of course, but we can't take a chance on that. I was hoping Deerfield would spot her. It won't do to have her come upon the convoy—with her gunnery range."

"No sir," was all Swayle answered, and he seemed to have trouble getting those two words out.

"That's all, Swayle. Off to the Skipper's office with you!"

"Yes sir!" the writer said, turning sharply on his heel and leaving the stateroom.

Ranford watched him leave and close the door.

"There are several kinds of courage," he muttered. "You're a very

brave man, Swayle. But then—all your kind are. They have to be."

He settled for that, and wondered what Swayle—or Du Laigne—would do next. He decided to take no further chance, and block-lettered another message which he himself carried personally to the Signal Officer.

The Skipper of a destroyer aft read it, smiled and gave Commander Ranford credit for thinking of a very old convoy trick.

THERE was no more air activity aboard the *Bennington* that day. The bridge officers were too busy making contact with the escorting destroyers and setting the convoy out according to Captain Tennant's orders.

They darkened ship at nightfall, and the watch was doubled until all were fully acquainted with the duties and precautions involved. The Scout-Bomber Squadron received a special lecture after dinner on details, silhouettes and ack-ack defense of the known German pocket-battleships. The fighter squadron was re-formed and split up into two emergency squadrons headed by Lieutenant-Commanders Deerfield and Slatery. This meant that every reserve fighter and pilot would be pressed into service; and each squadron, only slightly more than half its regulation strength, would be expected to carry out and complete missions far from their home shores and against an enemy that had the experience of nearly three years of actual warfare in his logbook.

Tod Moresby was placed on a light duty routine after a careful check-up of his condition had been made and X-ray pictures studied. It was believed by the medical staff that while the blow had been severe, it had not done much real damage. As a result he was allowed to return to his own stateroom, with instructions to report three times a day for further observation. He was thus able to accompany Eddie to dinner that night and get some of the details of what had happened since lunch.

"So he thinks Swayle is the dark person in the woodpile, eh?" said Moresby. "I think it's this guy Du Laigne. Old Staples has an idea it is, too. I talked to him down there in the sick-bay. He remembers more about it now. He and Du Laigne have had words—plenty of words over the way Swayle bawls him out on the flight-deck every chance he gets."

"Du Laigne was wandering all over the ship that day with a heavy steel spindle in his hands," Eddie added to the discussion.

"I didn't say anything to Staples," Moresby went on, "but he does lay it on heavy when he's ordering any of the C.P.O. pilots about. He goes as far as he dares with the commissioned crowd. These damn' broken-strippers!"

"The Ta'ker can be a nasty guy, if he likes," agreed Prebley.

"Du Laigne is one of life's unfortunates. He's a damn' good pilot, mind you; but I know he feels pretty sore that some of us kids came aboard with a ring of braid on our sleeves, whereas he who came up from below with two hitches to his credit, can only sport a C.P.O.'s badge and has to salute us guvs."

"I'm not going to argue that point, but Du Laigne is hardly officer material. He's a good pilot, and he's a real sailorman, but I'd hate to be under him. The trouble is we lay too much stress on the ability to pilot a plane. Actually, we know that it takes very little actual skill. Fifty per cent of the seamen on the hangar deck could be taught to fly any type aboard in six months. But can they go beyond that and assume command at a base, in the ready-room or in front of a Vee-of-Vee formation?"

"I hope *we've* got it," Tod added moodily.

"We'd better have. By the time this cruise is over, baby, we'll have seen plenty, and ten to one we'll get all the opportunity to find out whether we have or not."

"What are you doing tonight?" Tod asked. "I think I ought to crack a book or two. Ought to brush up on some of the convoy-signal stuff we started to take at Newport News."

"Not a bad idea. I'm going to mooch around topside when it gets dark. I've an idea I might turn something up."

"You're crazy! Want to get a smack over the ear like the one I got?"

PREBLEY leaped from his chair. "There you are, Tod!" he exclaimed. "That's just exactly what this guy—whatever he is—wants us to do. He pulls one or two sneak punches, and we all get the willies!"

"You can't laugh off a smack in the noggin."

"Just playing into their hands," Prebley went on. "Someone lowers the elevator at the wrong time, and every guy coming in is scared stiff it will happen to him. We've had some beaux of landings since that Pfeiffer affair. They're going to run off a strip of film later tonight showing what happened to the rest of the scout bombers after that. They say it's a pippin! You see their game, Tod?"

"Sure I see it. I got a chunk of it, and almost went to the funny factory. Why don't they fight out in the open?"

"Because it's a case of one or two guys taking on a whole aircraft carrier. Don't you see, Tod, unless we get through, all the way, this damned convoy and all it means to Russia will go to the bottom? If they can only make us turn back, for some screwy reason, it will be worth the effort!"



"What are you putting overboard, Swayle?" Prebley demanded.

"I'm not a dope. I can read papers and orders of the day," remonstrated Tod. "You don't have to pull a Buy-a-Bond lecture on me. I'm just sitting here with a smack in the kisser that must have loosened my old man's snappers. This war is becoming very real to me, Eddie."

"Look, Tod: I'm not arguing about your going topside with me. You don't have to. What I'm trying to do is to show you what this devil—whatever he is—is trying to do. Already he has fixed it so that we're getting plenty of squishy deck-landings. When they see those pictures tonight, they'll all get another fright, and we'll be a week getting them back to normal again."

"They shouldn't show those films," charged Tod.

"Tell that to the A.O. On top of that, we had that mess out there today because someone screwed up the met. report. What do you think that does to flying personnel morale? We've had four guys in the sickbay and another in splints aboard an escort destroyer somewhere astern. It's damn' clever stuff, Tod. Too damn' clever for my dough."

"Next we'll find the engines or fuel-tanks have been tampered with, and we'll have guys bobbing about all over the North Atlantic in rubber dinghies."

"You see! You see how it works! They have you figuring out other things that can happen. But don't worry. They won't touch the ships. There are too many chances of being caught that way. So far, they've played a very safe game."

"Okay! They've played a very safe game. You go topside tonight and risk it. If they're playing that safe, you stand a pretty good chance of getting a belt in the lug too."

"Then you won't come with me?" "I didn't say that. If you're dope enough to stick your chin out, I guess I'd better go along and drag you in by the heels."

"Thanks. I shall look forward to that. We'll sneak out while everyone is in the wardroom looking at the Keystone comedy landings, eh?"

"You know, this cruise is making a regular J. Edgar Hoover of you. I think I'll get my berth changed."

"Look at all the fun you'll miss," warned Prebley cheerfully as he dragged Tod to his feet.

At dinner that night there was plenty of facial evidence to indicate the general state of affairs in the minds of the flying personnel. Prebley and Moresby sat in with their usual group and listened more than they talked. It was evident that Com-



Prebley kept Swayle well ahead of him as they started up the ladder. He was taking no chances.

mander Ranford's show had, for one thing, created the impression Lieutenant-Commander Winton had expressed right from the start. If the Air Officer could fly like that and take the unnecessary chance he did, they were certain that he'd be a hell-on-wheels from now on. They could see themselves sent out under all weather conditions, now that they had joined the convoy. They were certain he was determined on taking every chance possible to get the convoy through, and the prospect was none too pleasant.

After all, the reports on the air action at the Battle of Midway were still fresh in their minds. They remembered the heroic effort of Torpedo Squadron 8, which had tackled three enemy aircraft carriers. Fifteen planes had been sent off a carrier, and not one had returned. Three Nip carriers had gone down, which read good in the newspapers, and it made glorious history for the pictorial weeklies; but after all, it meant a lot of swell guys wouldn't be around to read it.

"Am I glad we're doing high-altitude stuff," one member of 174 said bleakly over his slice of roast beef.

"Wait until you're just coming in over the lip and then see a nice large elevator-well wide open," Pfeiffer grumbled from the far end of the table.

"Yeh! Why don't someone figure out who did that?" a young ensign with a choir-boy expression chipped in.

"I'm telling you there's a war on," Biff Thoreau broke in again.

It went on in this general grumbling tone all through the dessert, and eventually carried out into the lounge while the mess stewards were clearing the tables and setting up the wardroom for the showing of the motion pictures that were to illustrate the landings of No. 174 after Pfeiffer had bundled into the open elevator shaft.

Tod and Prebley chuckled it and went forward along the passageways and found a space of rail on the port side.

"What we need is a damn' good scrap," Prebley suggested. "Something to take their minds off it all."

It was a beautiful night now, with a grand sequin scarf of stars thrown across the vault of the sky. Off in the distance they could see the dull out-

lines of the slogging freighters as they held their convoy positions.

The air was cold; and the wind cutting through the open slit between the carrier deck above and the fo'castle deck on which they stood, nipped at them and gave evidence to the fact that they were getting well into the northern shipping lane.

"Why wouldn't it feel cold?" argued Tod for no particular reason. "Look at all the ice-chunks floating about!"

"You'd think it was too late in the season to get that stuff down here."

"Anything can happen on this cruise."

"Now, don't start that again. Let's go below until we get the call. I got a couple of letters to write."

"I wouldn't worry. She's probably still taking the Weehawken ferry."

"Not this one. She's in a swell little cottage just outside Portsmouth, and she thinks I'm the best guy in the world. . . . Well," reflected Eddie as they moved aft again, "the second best, at any rate."

"Yeh? Who's No. 1?"

"Oh, he's a Navy guy too, so it's not too bad."

"A flyer?"

"And how!" Prebley admitted.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HALF an hour later they were back in the wardroom amid the scuffing of chairs, the low chatter of flying-men talking shop, and the business of setting up a portable screen and projector.

Lieutenant-Commander Draper, the Assistant Air Officer, sat silent in a swivel chair a short distance away from the screen. He was a tall morose man with a lantern jaw, and still relegated to light duty because of a wound he had received in the first battle of the Coral Sea. He acted like a man who would rather be carrying out a patrol somewhere.

A young electrician's mate, scrubbed until he shone, wearing a collar stiff from the laundry, and bearing the four regulation creases, carried out the work of setting up the projector. As he wound the power cables from the outlet and down through the center aisle of the seating arrangements, he made confidential suggestions and took instructions from Draper.

The pilots of what was left of the four tactical squadrons, and a fair sprinkling of gunners, observers and others of the air personnel gradually filled the wardroom. The lights were turned down, and the projector tested for focus and a portion of the film run through as a check.

"I think we're ready, sir."

"All right. Lights on a minute, please."

The chairs scuffed again, and Draper took his stand on a low platform beside the screen. He seemed more haggard than usual, and it was evident he was undertaking a distasteful job.

"All right, men," he began. "Quiet, please. I've called you in to go over this strip of film taken yesterday when we brought No. 174 in. We've got to remember now that we're on active service at last, and that we can no longer expect to have flight operations to fit our own convenience. Yesterday we had an unusual incident in which Lieutenant Pfeiffer was the unfortunate victim. That in itself was unusual and still unexplained, but we'll have to face a lot of unexplained events before this war is over. What worried most of us on the bridge was the effect Pfeiffer's accident had on the rest of you. There wasn't a reasonably good landing made after that, although deck and sea conditions were ideal."

He cleared his throat and continued: "This particular bit of film evidence is, of course, based on the landings made by No. 174, but the lesson offered by this film may well be studied by every pilot aboard. It is unfortunate for Pfeiffer that his particular pile-up be used as the focal point of this discussion, but it will be seen that his initial approach offers much to be desired in careful carrier airmanship."

There was a half-minute or so of pause, and Draper evidently intended to relieve the tension. "I know Lieutenant Pfeiffer won't mind all this. He's been up many times before for the same thing. We were together aboard the *Saratoga* shortly after Pearl Harbor, and aboard the *Sara*, he was affectionately known as 'Fandango' Pfeiffer, because of some of the strange maneuvers he went through getting on a deck. Between ourselves, he really gloried in the quasi-title."

"Don't mind me," Pfeiffer groaned from somewhere in the rear. "Just build an air-service on my broad shoulders."

"Good man!" Draper replied relievedly. "Now the lights, please."

The room was suddenly in darkness, and the portable projector sprayed an oblong glare of light on the pebbled screen. Spring cable whirled over the mechanism, and the footage of film raced into the feed-sprockets; and finally after a series of code figures and letters which identified the strip and dated it, a view of the stern end of the *Bennington's* flight-deck was spread on the screen.

"The first ship in, of course," Draper continued, "is that of Lieutenant Jackson. Here he comes now."

They watched with the interest that always prevailed whenever filmed evidence of their efforts were projected.

They saw Jackson come around into the wind after his run down the port side, and then lower his flaps and set himself for the skilled but careful approach.

Lieutenant-Commander Draper was making appropriate comments and pointed out the delicacy of timing and the accuracy of approach which had resulted in perfect carrier contact.

"Bring on Fandango!" some wag on the side demanded.

"What, no Screeno?" another wailed in a falsetto voice.

Draper was unequal to the occasion, and he let it go until Pfeiffer's Vought-Sikorsky wound into view. Prebley was intent on watching Pfeiffer corkscrew down and bank blindly over and head for the carrier-deck. He recalled it all now, and sat there waiting to see just when the amidship's elevator would descend. From the point from which the camera had been mounted, a small portion of the elevator platform could be seen. This might give him an idea just when the platform began to drop.

Prebley felt Moresby, who sat beside him, grip the lower part of his arm.

"Watch that platform," Eddie said quietly. "See, he dipped damned low below the deck-line."

"Hell with that! I'm looking at something else," said Tod in a husky whisper. "Watch that guy up there in the No. 2 catwalk bay—in there with those arrester-gear guys!"

Prebley tried to figure out what Tod meant, but he was still too interested in the oncoming V-S ship and timing the descent of the elevator.

Lieutenant-Commander Draper was saying: "You see, Pfeiffer, you went too low. You timed it badly, and you—now watch—you hooked her badly and came over too high—too steep an angle. You would have to pancake her to get your hook into the last arrester cable. See what I mean?"

THEY saw the rest in utter silence as Pfeiffer slipped over the lip, fluttered almost into a stall at the top, then dropped hard and went flopping into the open well of the lowered elevator.

"Just a minute! Just a minute, sir! Can we have Pfeiffer's show over again? There's a point there I want to see again. Do you mind?" That was Tod Moresby getting to his feet. "Good! Not at all. . . . Reverse that section, will you, please?"

While the film reversed and displayed, Pfeiffer taking off out of the hole flying backward, the rest of them howled in glee. Tod whispered to Prebley: "Never mind the plane or the elevator. Try to identify that guy in No. 2 safety bay. Watch what he does."

Prebley was uncertain what Tod meant, but he set himself for a new

inspection of the action. The film began again, and they saw Pfeiffer's crazy banked turn and his switchback approach for the lip.

"There!" exclaimed Tod. "See him! He's looking up at the bridge and making a signal. See, he's pointing at Pfeiffer's ship and nodding his head. The others are all watching Pfeiffer."

"Sure. I see him. I know him, too. That's Du Laigne's gunner. . . . What's his name?"

"Never mind. Watch!"

They saw Pfeiffer plunge up over the lip again and slam for the open elevator well, but they also saw the man who had signaled to the bridge duck down low out of sight, while the arrester-gear crew scrambled up to go to Pfeiffer's assistance.

"I'd still like to know who gave the order to lower that elevator," Pfeiffer grumbled from the darkness behind the projector.

"Thank you, sir," Moresby spoke out. "I was just trying to time the descent of that elevator with Pfeiffer's actual position in regard to the deck."

"Good! That's the sort of thing we want at these showings. Now here comes Humphries, who always makes a good landing. See, he starts in much too high and tries to kill it with a slushy fish-tail."

"Come on. We've seen enough," whispered Prebley. "I'm going topside again. I have a hunch."

They slipped out quietly and made the passageway and went toward the ladder that led up into the island.

"What was that guy doing in that catwalk, anyway? He wasn't supposed to be there, was he?" Tod Moresby demanded.

"Oh, they don't mind one now and again. They feel that they're showing interest in the job. But he sure signaled on Pfeiffer."

"Pfeiffer, the one guy who could be counted on to do something screwy. If he had hit the wrong way and wrenched his egg out, and it had exploded, they would have figured that—well, Pfeiffer has a tough sort of name, you know."

"You mean they would have figured he was a German and had been planted aboard to do his stuff? That might be," agreed Prebley as they reached the platform that led out onto the flight-deck.

They went outside and sniffed the cold breeze again and caught sight of a dim figure hurrying across the teak deck. He had apparently come up from below via the Flight-deck Officer's ramp ladder, and was heading for the flash-screen forward of the ack-ack platform.

"Who's that?" asked Tod.

"I don't know. Let's find out."

They moved swiftly and quietly along the base of the island and edged

around, their shoulders to the superstructure wall until they were in a position to note that the man had evidently kept a rendezvous with someone. Above, they could hear the steady tramp of the Watch Officer and the *flup-flup* of a seaman flailing his arms to keep warm. A bell jangled tunelessly somewhere as a melon-slice of moon broke cover above.

The man had passed under the slight overhang of the raised multiple-gun platform and stood silhouetted against the low rail.

"He had a date here for seven bells," Tod whispered.

"It looks like Jenkins—Du Laigne's gunner," answered Prebley. "The guy you spotted in the landing film."

"Ok! Let's watch."

In a minute there were more footsteps, and another figure came along the starboard rail from an island exit on the other side. Prebley could see Jenkins twist and look anxiously. The other man joined him, and they stood there a minute without saying a word.

"This is the second," a voice said. There could be no mistaking it. That was Swayle, the A.O.'s writer. "I'm taking no chances on this one."

"We took one too many," Jenkins said. "I was just below looking at some landing shots. Jeesh! Was I a dope? There's me standing up there as big as a house, pointing up at the bridge when Pfeiffer was coming in."

"So what?"

"I wouldn't mind, only one of the torpedo-bomber guys spotted something and asked to have the clip run over. He said he wanted to see something," Jenkins went on, his voice losing calm with every sentence.

"Who was it—Prebley?"

"No, the guy who bunks with him, Moresby," Jenkins said, after a short interval of mental reconstruction. "He should have got a real crack on the lug—the lug!"

"Now, take it easy," Swayle soothed him. "We should have remembered that ciné-Kodak business. Still, we've only got a couple days to go."

"Then what?"

"You know what. Now listen for that guy on the bridge. When he's clear, let me know."

"What's going on?" whispered Moresby.

"I don't know. I don't get it."

JENKINS left Swayle and moved toward the center of the flight-deck. Somehow, he missed spotting Moresby and Prebley flattened against the superstructure. He sauntered on nonchalantly until he reached the center guide-line, then stopped and peered up at the sky. Then turning, he glanced at the bridge, watched the duty officer come up to the port end of the bridge, and then began to whistle tunelessly.

"Come on!" Prebley snapped.

They darted around the base of the bridge just in time to see Swayle lift a wooden box over the rail. It was a light-colored box, one that might have been used by a packing-house to crate bacon or fowl.

"Wait a minute, Swayle!" Eddie called.

Swayle looked over his shoulder, and the moon brought out the frantic mask of his face. Eddie made a rush and tried to grab him, but when he reached Swayle, the box was gone.

"Mr. Prebley!" Swayle managed to say.

"What's the idea, Swayle?" Prebley demanded. "What are you putting overboard?"

"You can't do that, Swayle!" Moresby added, leaning over the rail and watching the white box burble away on the swells that were being combed out by the prow of the carrier. "You know the rules!"

"Just some messy junk I cleared out of the office. Nothing important, sir," Swayle finally managed.

"How do we know? You two guys are acting pretty queer. Where's Jenkins? See where Jenkins went, will you, Tod?"

"What are you trying to do, sir?" Swayle said, and suddenly yanked his arm clear of Eddie's grasp.

"I'm trying to find out what your game is. What was in that box?"

"I told you. I can't stay here, sir. I'm wanted in the Air Officer's office."

"You sure are. Come on, I'll go up with you."

Tod came back. "Cleared off clean. Maybe we're charting a true course, eh? What's the idea, Swayle?"

"I don't think I have to make any excuses or explanations under circumstances like this," the Petty Officer clerk argued.

"Right! I think you should make them to someone. Come on."

"You go up with him. I'll see if I can track Jenkins down," Tod said. . .

Prebley kept Swayle well ahead of him as they went through the island bulkhead door and started up the ladder for the Air Officer's quarters. He was taking no chances on the writer slugging him and dumping him over. He visualized all sorts of wild tricks, now that he had practically caught the man red-handed.

Swayle, however, was game and went through the motions. He led the way into Commander Ranford's quarters, announced Prebley according to formula, with dignity and cold contempt.

"Ensign Prebley, sir. He wishes to speak to you."

Commander Ranford had a message form on his desk under the glare of the desk-lamp. He folded it carefully, stuffed a metal-covered code-book away and greeted Prebley coolly.

"Anything wrong, Prebley?"

"I'd like a word with you your writer present, sir—if I may."

"Is it important?"

"I don't know, sir. That's for you to decide."

"I haven't much time. Make it brief."

For a minute Prebley stared at the Commander confusedly. Did he think he'd barge in like this if there wasn't something important to discuss?

"Well, let's have it," Ranford said testily.

"A minute or so ago, sir, Ensign Moresby and I saw Swayle put a fairly large-sized box over the side—under rather suspicious circumstances."

COMMANDER RANFORD went on arranging a few items on his desk with a disinterested air. "What do you mean—suspicious circumstances?" he snapped back.

He was with Jenkins—that's Du Laigne's gunner in our squadron, sir. From what we saw, Jenkins stood out on the deck, and when the watch officer moved to the port wing of the bridge, Swayle took what I would consider a signal from Jenkins and put this box overside."

"What about it, Swayle?" the Commander asked, his back to Prebley as he snapped off his desk light.

"It was nothing, sir. Just a bundle of unnecessary office matter that was cluttering up my files. It wasn't a box at all. Just a wad of old ship's supply catalogues, some old personal mail and postal cards."

"You know that sort of thing is supposed to be destroyed or baled aboard, don't you?"

"Yes sir; but most of this was personal—letters and old photographs. I don't like that sort of thing to become common property along every bag alley below, sir."

Prebley was struck by the man's vocabulary and his ability to control a situation. He sensed that he was up against a very clever operator.

"I can understand that," Ranford said with a nod.

"But excuse me, sir. Both Moresby and I saw it clearly—a good-sized box. Swayle is not telling the truth."

"That will be difficult to prove now, won't it?"

For a minute Prebley was stunned that the Commander would take Swayle's word against that of two of his own officers.

"You could have an accompanying destroyer attempt to pick it up, sir," he suggested, clutching at the faintest of hopes.

"Mr. Prebley," Ranford growled, "we're on convoy duty. I'll be more than delighted to play parlor games at some other time. My destroyers have more important matters to attend to."

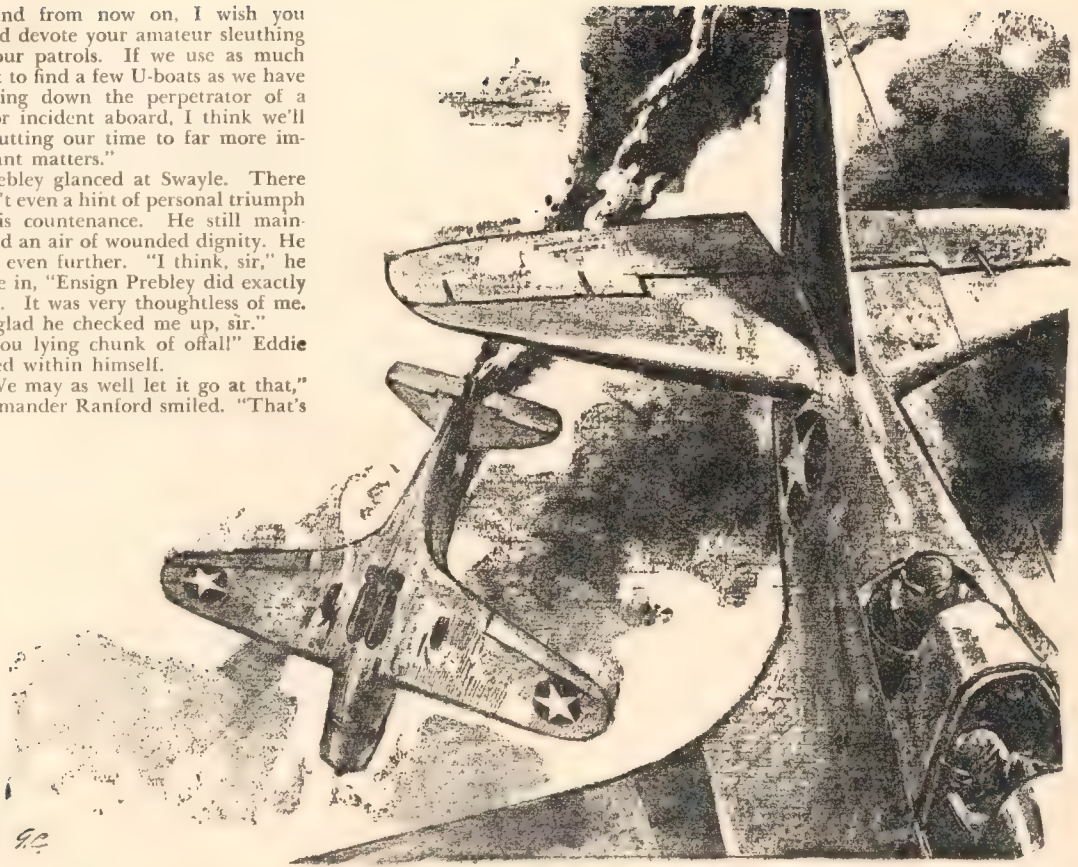
"Aye-aye, sir!"

"And from now on, I wish you would devote your amateur sleuthing to your patrols. If we use as much effort to find a few U-boats as we have tracking down the perpetrator of a minor incident aboard, I think we'll be putting our time to far more important matters."

Prebley glanced at Swayle. There wasn't even a hint of personal triumph in his countenance. He still maintained an air of wounded dignity. He went even further. "I think, sir," he broke in, "Ensign Prebley did exactly right. It was very thoughtless of me. I'm glad he checked me up, sir."

"You lying chunk of offal!" Eddie ranted within himself.

"We may as well let it go at that," Commander Ranford smiled. "That's



"Get out, Wint!" Prebley called. . . . "Overside, man!" But no one aboard the leader's plane made a move. . . . The Devastator began to dive.

all, Prebley. You needn't worry about Swayle. He's doing all right for me. Good night, sir."

"Yes sir. Good night."

Completely deflated, Eddie Prebley went below to seek the comfort of his stateroom. On the way down he tried to analyze the strange personality of the man who was his father. Was he so blind that he couldn't see the possibility of Swayle's act? Why was it that for a few hours a day he played the normal rôle of a man who was interested in his son and then with a twist of some mysterious dial became a hard-bitten, unreasoning man to whom any assistance, suggestion or effort to aid, automatically became a personal insult?

HE found Moresby lolling in an easy-chair poring over a new code-signal sheet.

"Hi, boy!" Tod greeted. "When's the hanging?"

"There won't be any—unless it's us."

"I don't get it!" Moresby straightened up.

"Neither did the Air Officer. I told him what happened, and Swayle argued that he was only tossing away a few personal letters and photographs. Said he didn't want the whole ship reading his mail, when reminded that such stuff was to be baled or destroyed aboard. I suppose I should have taken him before the Old Man."

"But it was a box—a big box!"

"He denied it, and the Commander said I'd have a time proving it."

"But we both saw it. Two against one— isn't it?"

"Not against Swayle. He's the white-haired boy on this covered wagon. I felt like an awful dope!"

"You can wind up in 84 on Mare Island for a trick like that aboard a real battle-wagon!" Tod blustered.

"Not Swayle. He's a big help, so the Commander says. What about Jenkins? You find him?"

"Sure. He was below at the soda fountain getting a coke."

"What did he say?"

"Just looked dumb. Said he just went up there to see Swayle about get-

ting an okay to send a radio message back home to his mother for her birthday. How do they think of such gags so fast?"

"They're both smart. Did you mention spotting him in the landing film?"

"No. I decided to hold that for later—just in case."

"He'll probably prove that he was leading a quartet of madrigal-singers among the arrester-gear crew," mooned Prebley.

"What's the matter with that guy up there—the Air Officer?"

"You got me. Tonight he acted as though he didn't have all his marbles."

"A nice guy to go to Murmansk with, eh?"

Prebley sat down in a chair and stared at the circular plate that blocked in their porthole. "There's only one thing," he said quietly. "Funny how words can be spoken in such a way that they can convey—not exactly a different meaning—but they can imply a little reverse English."

"That makes something very clear—in reverse English," grinned Tod.



Biff Thoreau plunged headlong at the German seaplane. He caught the Arado stiff and she broke off at the pontoon leg.

"You'd better turn in. You're on the early patrol in the morning. I also saw when I was below that they were loading five-hundred-pounders in place of torps. What does that mean?"

"I wouldn't know, unless he's trying to make it harder," said Prebley.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE snarl of the bugle over the speaker system roused them out at five-thirty and Winton led them down the passageway with sleep-shackled strides to the coffee mess and from there on to the ready-room where

a brief patrol advice was read off. The navigators had checked a course the night before and after a short consultation with the Nav. Officer, only slight changes were made in their flight plans and they went bundling back to the coffee counter.

Aloft the power-choked engines of the Devastators were pounding and warming up. A boatswain's pipe shrilled again and they went back to the ready-room.

"Secret and confidential," the Air Officer was saying from the slightly raised platform. "Not to be discussed on the hangar or flight-deck. It is now known that a German light cruiser—

possibly the *Nürnberg*—is at sea. She was last sighted four days ago between Iceland and the Faroes. Her direction was uncertain but it is believed she leads a new enemy raiding flotilla and may be heading for the convoy in our charge."

"Now there's a baby that can maneuver," Winton said in an aside to Thoreau.

"An intense watch will be kept for this enemy vessel. You have your silhouette books with you. She's a six-thousand-tonner capable of thirty-two knots. She carries eight 3.5 ack-acks and eight three-pounders. Length six hundred and three feet overall, a

trunked stack, a heavy built-up mast and what should be interesting to our gunners: a catapult. Vessels of the *Nürnberg* class carry two Arado seaplanes."

"Baby, oh, baby!" someone gloated. The Air Officer went on:

"Because of the possibility of encountering this cruiser, two five-hundred-pound bombs have been fitted, and high altitude instead of torpedo attack will be made. That's all."

"I wish I had a Doolittle twenty-cent bomb-sight," a chubby bombardier cackled.

"Pilots ready?"

"No. 1 ready, sir!"

They charged out, up the ladders like pack-saddled monkeys and billowed out on the flight-deck. In threes they moved to their planes and clambered up with a clatter of hatch covers. The bull-horn boomed with authority: "Clear of propellers!"

"Start engines!"

A cold gush of steady intensity swept down the deck as the *Bennington* turned into the wind. She picked up speed to conform with take-off requirements and ripped a long white scar across the leaden waters that would pass close to the bow of the leader of the port column. An escort destroyer came around under the *Bennington's* stern and stood by for eventualities.

A SIGNAL box on the island glowed red. An incandescent wand was agitated somewhere near the Flight-Deck Officer's ramp and Winton went off into the darkness with a roar of power that enveloped the bow lip.

Thoreau went next, steady and sure—he whanged off dragging a slim scarf of electric blue exhaust.

Prebley got the wand signal, palmed his throttle up the gate and hoiked his tail joyously as he thumped past the island. He watched his instruments carefully for the first minute or so and moved into position behind Winton's port elevator.

"Keep it wide," warned Winton. "No need to tangle up tight yet."

They formed at four thousand feet a mile or so ahead of the convoy knowing full well the carrier would have to circle wide and return to her convoy position a mile or so off the starboard quarter of the convoy.

Prebley drew his hatch back and sucked in the icy-cold air and reveled in the cleanliness and mental freedom of the air. He, like most of the others, now flew and maintained his station in the formation by instinct. The worries and suspicions of the wardroom and flight quarters aboard the carrier were quickly erased by the rush of ice-tanged air. The buoyancy of flight was transferred to his spirits and he completely forgot the events of the night before.

The patrol was routine in action. Lieutenant-Commander Winton had only ten planes in his formation since Moresby was still on the sick list for a few days and another plane was held below for a routine check. He therefore decided on a four-plane diamond lead section with Thoreau, Prebley and Du Laigne behind him and Mifflin and Boyle pointing up two three-ship Vees on port and starboard. They headed into the northeast and watched the sun wedge its golden blade through the horizon, gild the clouds and brush the lazy rollers with a brassy lacquer.

They swept on in a wide scouting formation, the gunners and observers studying the sea below and pondering on the myriad shapes of the ice floes that flobbered through the gentle heaves of the sea and took on intermittent gleams from the sunrise.

Winton's wings wigwagged a signal and they spread even wider as they approached a layer of sparkling altocumulus cloud. They hit it solid and saw Winton nose up gently and climb through into the long beam-spiked corridor—and then stagger drunkenly, gush a jagged splotch of flame from a wing-root and drop an under-carriage leg.

"Glory! Winton's stopped something!" Prebley gasped, his eyes welded tight to the leader's Devastator. He plunged on and then winced as Biff Thoreau swept over him to the right, missing the top of his hatch cover by inches.

"What the—"

He nosed down slightly and tried to get up close to Winton's ship. By now the whole front of the torpedo-bomber was seemingly bulging with flame.

"Get out, Wint!" he called, feeling helplessness drain through him. "The silk, Wint. . . . *Override, man!*"

But no one aboard the leader's plane made a move. They just sat there, from what Prebley could see of them. The flame gushed through an open hatch above the navigator's cockpit and the Devastator rolled over on her back and began to dive.

Prebley looked around for Du Laigne and then signaled a turn and came around on his port wing-tip. He could see Du Laigne nodding understandingly and Eddie decided to take over the section until he could figure out what had happened to Biff.

As he came around, a new feature of the swirling picture came into view. It was a biplane with slightly swept-back wings, bearing the swastika emblem of Germany. Below, fanging out like two massive tusks, were a pair of gleaming pontoons.

Prebley caught it at once: "Arado! Nazi Arado seaplane. . . . A catapult job. . . . Come on, Craig! Here's your meat!"

The back-staggered biplane, its gunner firing broadside at Winton, went

into a slack dive and circled the flaming Devastator. Aft, Craig's gun began to break into a slow stuttering response and then suddenly stopped just when the vibrations began to work up a promising retaliation. In its place came a sullen battering and clank of metal that echoed through the long hollow tunnel of the fuselage.

"Come on, Craig! Let him have it!"

But Biff Thoreau came out of nowhere again and tore on in a mad dive after the Arado. Prebley could see Biff's front gun sending streaks of silver-flecked tracer in the general direction of the seaplane which had now struggled into a tight spiral.

"Get a quick position on this, Slater," Eddie ordered. "We'll get a destroyer here fast and see if we can pick up any of them."

SLATER didn't answer, and Prebley assumed he was busy checking the action location. He nosed down and went after Biff, worked his way into a position where Craig might be able to get a broadside shot and noted in his mirror that Du Laigne was following him down and trying to get into a like position and complete the circle.

Biff plunged his Devastator up close to the floundering Arado, and Prebley glowed with admiration for the manner in which Thoreau had taken this—his first—chance to tangle with an enemy plane. Through his mind in teletype clarity and speed ran the confidential announcement of the Air Officer.

A German light cruiser that carried a catapult—and two Arados. Here was one Arado that had already downed a torpedo-bomber. That meant if she had used up every mile of her range to sit up here and stalk, the enemy cruiser couldn't be much more than three hundred miles away! Probably a good deal less!

They had her now, this skulking devil that had struck so suddenly. They had her tight in a circle of high speed metal from which she had little chance to escape.

"Come on, Craig!" Prebley pleaded.

Biff had led the attack down and came out in a tight bank almost level with the Arado. The three Devastators were well spaced in the tightening web they were spinning for her.

Prebley could see Malcolm, Thoreau's gunner, pounding short jolting bursts at the Arado which was trying to wriggle out of the trap with a series of tight banks and jerky side-slips. Eddie maintained his position and watched over his shoulder as Du Laigne covered his segment and followed. Jenkins, the gunner, was pounding wild insane bursts across the sky and spraying the battle disc with tracer.

"Come on, Craig!" Eddie yelled again.

Then came another battering of metal and the sudden thud of unmistakable blows along the fuselage.

"What the— Is that Nazi gunner getting at me? Hey, Craig!"

There was no answer.

Biff Thoreau finally won his chance and charged at the doomed Arado. He came round tight, leveled off and plunged headlong at the German seaplane, his front gun punching out a streaming jet of Browning fire. He caught the Arado stiff and she broke off at the pontoon leg, dropped a float which fluttered away and let a wing section slam back and blot out all detail of the fuselage.

"There's something for you to sleep on tonight, Biff," Prebley muttered.

They reformed when the Arado hit with a dull splash and left nothing but a section of wing panel showing above the water. Then they noted that Boyle and Miffin had brought their sections down to join them.

Winton's craft was about a mile away, a smoking mess of dural that trailed a straggling oil slick behind it.

"Take over, Prebley," Thoreau called over his set. "I'm not feeling so good. I can remember when my folks always took a couple of paper bags along when we went on a trolley car. I feel like that now."

"I figure we'd better get back fast—and report," Prebley answered.

"I don't know. I just feel blah. Why not give Winton a last break and report him down? That won't tell too much."

"Right. Reform Vee-of-Vees!"

Then he leaned back and called to Slater. "All right, Slate! Give me a course, will you?"

HE looked over his shoulder but couldn't see Slater. He could see Craig, however. The gunner was out of action, his head thrown back, his mouth wide open, one hand still clutching a hatch-cover handle. . . . No wonder he hadn't fired again!

Prebley struggled up against the tug of his straps and looked over the back of his seat. Slater was a pile of stained equipment somewhere below his folding chart board. He snapped his switch to "Send" and called Biff.

"Okay, Biff, if you've got another bag, I'll take it. Take over, will you? I've got two for Arlington Cemetery in the back seat. Take over, will you, Biff?"

Biff took over and they returned on a course figured by his navigator.

They got back in a commendable formation and Biff sent Prebley in first. The wind had changed and the Bennington swung off to the south-east to get them aboard. On the way around for a position, Eddie noticed that all the destroyers were still with the convoy and he cursed under his breath. He'd looked for one all the

way back, believing that the Skipper would at least give Winton and his crew a break.

"I wish I could figure that," he muttered swinging around into the wind. "Wouldn't risk a destroyer to pick up a guy. I'll be go-to-hell!"

As he maneuvered, coaxed and ruddered his Devastator into her final glide the full realization of their morning took possession of him. The fact that they had engaged an enemy in the air (that for which they had prepared over many months of anxious training) had come and gone like an incomplete nightmare. For the first time he had actually seen a German

Solution to crossword puzzle on page 9

B	E	W	I	L	D	E	R	D	E	S	I	R	E	
E	M	A	C	I	A	T	E	E	V	E	N	E	D	
F	I	N	E	D	R	A	W	B	E	T	I	D	E	
A	L	T	S	E	C	A	N	T	S	T	E	N		
L	I	E	S	S	I	X	E	S	T	I	E			
L	A	D	E	N	S	E	W	T	R	A	M	P		
			T	A	R	T	S	H	E	A	T	E	R	
P	A	T	T	I	E	S		N	U	N	N	E	R	Y
U	P	H	E	L	D		R	I	T	E	S			
T	R	I	E	S		S	E	C		T	I	B	E	R
	I	N	S		D	I	V	O	T		T	A	X	I
I	L	K		S	E	M	I	T	E	S		B	I	D
D	I	E	S	E	L		S	I	N	K	A	B	L	E
E	N	R	O	L	L		E	N	T	A	I	L	E	R
A	E	S	T	A	S		R	E	S	T	L	E	S	S

air insignia on a wing. He had flown across a segment of air through which enemy gun-fire had attempted to stitch his shroud. He'd seen his squadron leader go down in flames . . . a flamer!

Thoreau was right. There was a war on! All the months of radio commentators, newsreels flashed on screens from San Diego to Newport News, headlines in black, red and green, picture papers and weeklies in color and roto had meant nothing. What did they know about a war?

Winton had gone down. Winton who had the two-and-a-half stripes of a Lieutenant Commander before he was thirty; Winton, whose dab of democracy was heaven's half-acre and a bungalow. A service flag somewhere that would have its star changed to gold. Perhaps a medal awarded posthumously to a brave-eyed widow who would practice a suitable reply for hours before she came face to face with an ashen-cheeked Vice-Admiral.

The next thing Prebley knew he was down with hardly a bump. He looked about puzzled, trying to remember whether he had come in low and zoomed over the lip or whether he had just pancaked in.

They were standing around in a dumb half-circle, pointing to the perforations and snagged wounds of dural that fouled the sleek fuselage of the Devastator. The Hot Papas stalked out like uncertain prehistoric men and just stood there—their metal cutters

and Fire-Foam nozzles impotent in their massive paws.

"They're dead!" Prebley retched over the metallic snarl of the bullhorn. "Get them out—they're dead!"

He wrenched his hatch back farther and stood up, and bellowed wildly at the bridge: "Stop that confounded noise, bosun! Can't you see they're dead? Both dead!"

Then he stood still and found himself staring up into the face of Commander Ranford.

"Get that aircraft off the deck!" Ranford bellowed through his cupped hands. "Get it away . . . I tell you!"

A volcanic cauldron of defiance boiled up within Ensign Prebley. He focused his eyes on the man who had three stripes of braid on the epaulet of his greatcoat. It never occurred to Prebley that he was being dramatic or theatrical. His revolt was based on the time-honored law that the dead were entitled to their rights.

"I'm not moving this plane until Slater and Craig are removed, sir. They're entitled to the honors of a quarterdeck. They're through, sir."

FOR seconds there was a silence that put a purple filter on the drab early morning light. The plane crews and putty-faced members of the arsester-gear teams stood on the deck about him, stunned, then looked up at Ranford and to their amazement saw the Air Officer stand erect, salute and say, "Aye, aye sir! Thank you, Mr. Prebley!"

Then out of the corner of his mouth he gave an order to the Signal Officer. A Marine stepped forward, glanced up at the slowly circling Devastators and waited until he heard the wail of a halliard block. The colors were coming down to half-mast on the gaff. The silver-clear notes of the bugle rang out and the available ship's company stood to attention.

Ensign Prebley hadn't expected all this. He tried to stand to attention on the seat of his cockpit but felt himself swaying and tottering with the emotion of revolt and the marrow-draining inspiration of this impromptu service ritual. He closed his eyes and leaned forward against the hatch cover and waited until the last notes of the bugle took the tension from his throat.

He turned again and looked at the bridge. There was no expression of any sort on the faces up there—simply a row of masks hung on a rack. He saluted blindly and mumbled, "Thank you, sir."

Someone helped him down and held his elbow while another indistinct group clambered aboard to remove the navigator and gunner. Two basket stretchers and blankets were laid out; Eddie Prebley walked away and leaned against the base of the island.

The Devastators circled again and the Talker spoke his orders once more with almost clerical dignity. . . .

"What happened?" Captain Tennant was demanding while he poured a cup of jamoke from a thermos bottle.

Prebly looked around and discovered they'd led him aloft to the Skipper's stateroom. His gear was scattered about over the floor and he made an involuntary gesture to retrieve it.

"Never mind that. What happened?"

"You didn't send a destroyer, sir. You could have given Winton a break."

"We can't take chances like that. They'd have a sub just sitting waiting for it. That would have been a perfect set-up for them. What was it?" insisted Captain Tennant.

"A German Arado. Thoreau got him after the swine had caught Winton as we went up through a layer of cloud. He never had a show, sir."

"That's the way it happens. You saw only one?"

"Just one, sir."

The Air Officer, the Navigation Officer and the Air Intelligence Officer were there too. They were all taking notes and fumbling with papers and patrol forms. Swayle hovered in the background, taking telephone messages and continually wetting his lips.

OUTSIDE the rest of the squadron was coming in one by one. Bradley of No. 3 section missed the last cable, tried to fishtail and went over the side with a grind and splash. Teddy Booth pancaked and took a tire off and crumpled a wing-tip at the base of the X multiple .50 cal. ack-ack platform. A destroyer picked up Bradley's crew, bruised, soaked and still bemoaning the fact that they hadn't even fired a shot.

"I suppose you all realize what this means," Captain Tennant said, addressing the rest.

They nodded, one by one, staring at young Prebly who had sat down to sip the hot coffee.

"There's a German cruiser somewhere ahead," Captain Tennant went on. "At most, two hours' flight away. You can work it out from the position this air action took place. I'd like to see a working chart on that, Henderson."

"If that Arado got off a signal, they'll know full well we're out here," Commander Ranford put in.

"I've thought of all that. We'll get the VSB crowd off as soon as we can muster and draw up patrol instructions," the Skipper added coldly, and then said, "I'd like to get that cruiser, gentlemen."

"If we're going to get through with any of this convoy, we've got to get her," the Air Officer reminded him.

Eddie Prebly sat in on it all and tried to reconstruct the minutes that had been an epoch a little more than an hour before. He wondered how much of it he could remember and put down lucidly for the Air Intelligence Officer. He tried to recall what had really happened to Winton. What had happened to Craig and Slater, and when had it happened? Craig had started to fire at that Arado and then suddenly stopped. He thought on that—as the Arado was in no position to fire at him. As he recalled it now the German gunner was still pouring it to poor Winton.

There was a knock on the door and Swayle went and opened it a trifle. Someone outside mumbled and Swayle seemed uncertain what to do.

"What is it, Swayle?" Captain Tennant demanded testily.

"The Armament Chief, from below, sir. He'd like to see—someone."

But the pudgy little C.P.O. had almost forced his way in by now and was standing there with his cap in his hand. The other hand was clenched tight into a knotty fist.

"What is it?" Ranford demanded.

The C.P.O. looked about a minute and then completely ignoring the Gold Braid, went up to Prebly.

"You should see this, sir," he began. "This was in your bus. I found it when we were getting your gunner out. There's two more when we can pry them out."

He held out his fist and showed a bent and jacket-torn bullet. He dropped it into Prebly's open hand and backed off.

Ranford went to Prebly's chair. "What is it?" he inquired.

"A bullet . . . one of ours, I think. A bullet he found in my plane. How can that be?"

The Skipper came over, took the bent slug and peered at the base of the metal jacket. There, clear and undamaged was the letter "R" moulded into the lead.

"A Remington bullet."

"That was fired from one of our guns, sir," the portly little C.P.O. expounded. "Someone fired at one of his own planes. Maybe there's more in the—" Then he stopped short out of respect for young Craig, whom he had known very well.

"I'll see about an examination of the bodies," the Skipper muttered. "Also bring me any others you find in that aircraft."

"Yes sir. I sure will. Would you figure anything was wrong there, sir?"

"Treat this as confidentially as you can, Chief," Ranford said simply.

"Aye-aye, sir."

"I appreciate your interest, Chief." Ranford gave one of his rare smiles.

This story of a carrier on convoy comes to a climax in the next, the March, issue.

In response the C.P.O. beamed and then he looked at Prebly and added: "Don't worry, sir. I'll get the guy who drilled you!"

Prebly gave him a friendly salute. "You'll interrogate all crews, of course, sir?" the Air Officer suggested.

"Who went down to help Winton?" Captain Tennant asked Prebly.

"Thoreau, Du Laigne and myself, sir. As I recall it now, Craig only fired a few rounds. He must have got it quick. Du Laigne was behind me and followed on my signal. Thoreau crossed over the minute he saw what had happened," explained Prebly, standing up and using his flattened hands to illustrate the position of the ships. "He was on the port side, you see, sir, and could see the Arado first. He crossed over me pretty close and somehow I instinctively went down after Winton."

"Then you didn't actually see the Arado until Thoreau had probably fired at him first?"

"No sir. The enemy plane evidently went into a dive after Thoreau attacked, driving him down to somewhere about my level. I remember seeing the Arado gunner firing broadside at Winton's ship which was then in flames and fully out of control."

"The other two sections stayed upstairs?"

"I can't say, sir. At any rate I never saw any of them actually take part in the action. Boyle was well to the south or starboard side and probably missed the first part of the action while he was leading his section through the cloud layer. Mifflin must have passed over us, playing safe in the cloud until he was clear. He would have missed much of it, too. I didn't notice either section until the action was completed."

"We can check that, of course," Ranford admitted glumly. "As it stands now either Du Laigne or Thoreau could have fired the bullets the C.P.O. says he found in your aircraft. That is to say, the pilots or their gunners."

"You'll have a hard time proving who fired them," young Prebly said with a knowing glance. That would make up for last night!

THE stateroom door burst open and an anxious-eyed officer muffled in an overcoat and a red scarf shoved in.

"On the bridge, sir," he began without formality. "Your advice, sir. A question concerning floating ice."

"If there's any question," snapped Tennant, reaching for his bridgecoat, "put a few shells into it. Come on, Guns!"

"I hope it is ice out there, Swayle," Prebly said with cold intensity.

"Sir?"

"You'll find out," Prebly answered, deciding to go out on the bridge and see what all the commotion was about.

The Good Ones You

THEY moved all the tables in McLeod's Dance-hall to the front end of the long room; and in front of the small platform against the back wall, Jeff Wells strung his fringed muslin curtain of turkey red. He carried it over to screen a passage to the small room off the corner of the hall that was to serve as dressing-quarters. He called the spittoon-polisher and McLeod's barkeep for help then, in arranging the tables and the extra chairs to form an amphitheater before the curtained platform; and while they worked, scraping chairs over the pine wood floor, he saw to filling his spot lanterns and to raising the big hanging lanterns on their chains so their light would not get in the eyes of the audience.

He went then into the dressing-room and opened Lilly's painted trunk and got out her costumes, holding them up, filmy voluminous gowns catching on his hard brown hands, for inspection, and laid them out on the long cloth-covered faro-table that had been brought here for that purpose. He went out and walked up the long room to the bar, and while the barkeep looked up from moving a table to watch, Jeff took his back-bar mirror and his two small back-bar lamps, and carried them to the dressing-room and set them up.

In the alley behind the hall, where the freighter had dumped their truck, he found the rolled-up rug, tied with half-inch rope, and their painted canvas backdrop, nailed to slats so it could be folded.

He dragged the stuff into the hall and up on the platform behind the curtain, which billowed at all his movements. Lilly would not like this narrow stage any better than she had liked any of the narrow stages from El Paso up. The carpet, unrolled on the platform floor and folded under at the edges, was a faded scarlet, dusty and worn and spotted, in one place, with a great fresh stain. Some cow-hand had thrown a glass of whisky, the night they had showed in Lincoln County. He hadn't meant to hit the stage; he had only been too happy and appreciative and drunk; and instead of applauding, he had thrown the drink up in the air and it had arced to the stage, turning over and over but somehow keeping enough whisky in the glass to ruin the carpet. But the spot was not noticeable from out front.

He set up the backdrop on its unsteady legs. It was a scene of Paris,



France, or so Lilly said. Jeff wouldn't know. It showed marble columns, trees and a curving street.

With the set put up and McLeod's piano moved to a place at the corner of the stage, only half visible, Jeff's work was done. He got his hat and his coat and went out into the street, and moved through the crowds up toward the hotel corner. Knots of men were gathered in front of McLeod's in the dusk, trying to peer above the screens McLeod had put at his windows, anxious for a glimpse of Lilly Argent. Horses stamped at the rail; shouts carried up and down the street on the cold and gusty air. A

few snowflakes were starting to spit down, now that it was evening, and the horses lowered their heads and circled at their tie-ropes to get their rumps into the wind. Winter can hit hard in the Mogollones. Jeff lifted his face, and the wind tugged at the drooping black mustache over his mouth. He could smell a blizzard, a New Mexico norther. That might be bad, or it might be good.

Light spilled into the street from the fronts of Guy's Saloon and Andrew Belcher's Golden Eagle. The stores were closed and dark.

The town had not changed much; it was about as he remembered it;

Forget

He planned to kill the man—then the girl and the actress lady shuffled the cards.

by WILLIAM BRANDON



grown a little, perhaps, swelling with the price of beef. Lilly was surely catching this town with its jeans full of silver. Jordan had always been a good town to winter cowboys. It was a good and popular town, and there was always something doing in Jordan.

He came abreast of the hotel, his limp more pronounced now as the cold got to the stiffness in his leg. He recognized Arch Brewster and Tom Phillips standing with several other men on the hotel corner; he had passed a half-dozen familiar faces on the walk up the street. No one had recognized him, and he did not know

what about him was most responsible for the change: the mustache, the stiff leather coat drawn up around his face, or the limp that slowed and disguised his gait. After all, you recognize a man largely by the way he moves.

The hotel bar, half empty and warm and yellow with light, invited him, and he turned inside and ranged up to the bar and hooked the heel of his stiff leg over the gutter rail. He ordered whisky, from a barkeep who was new to him, and paid with a silver dollar and drank up his change. The doors clashed and slammed as men moved in and out, and the bar began to fill. Jeff kept his head down, his eyes on his drink. He was hungry, but he didn't want to go on in the hotel and join Lilly and Professor Yinna, her piano-player. McLeod and certain of the gayer and more im-

portant merchants of the town would be giving a party for her; it was the formula, in each town. It was possible that Waldo Johns would be there. That would depend on whether Waldo had gone up or down in the last two years, and Jeff was fairly satisfied he had gone up.

He made a smoke and started toward the door; a crowd of incoming men swirled around him, and one of them turned, and a voice said: "Why, I'll go to hell! Jeff! Jeff Wells!"

On the point of turning, Jeff stopped himself, and a second later young Slim Bernard was beside him, looking into his face, unchanged in the slightest from the day Jeff had seen him last, thin-faced, half drunk, light-colored eyes in a terrific good humor, and yellow hair sticking raggedly out from under the curling brim of his hat. Jeff looked at him coldly, with the right amount of surprise at being stopped. He said: "What's the matter?"

Slim's face turned pink. "Not a thing, Mister. Got the wrong party. Took you for a fella I knew. Apologies offered."

JEFF nodded and glanced after him with the correct curiosity and amusement, and went on to the door. He dropped his cigarette and stepped on it as he pushed into the street. Little doubt remained in his mind that he was no longer Jeff Wells; something about him had pulled a wire of memory in Slim's mind, but a full look at him under good light had convinced him he was wrong. The change, then must be deep indeed. Jeff Wells was dead and all but buried; this man who now walked under his name, with a limp and a hard face, aged by the mustache, was someone else entirely. Inside and out, Jeff thought bitterly, but with the knowledge meanwhile that he really didn't care much, one way or another.

Beyond the hotel the street scattered out into frame and adobe houses, and a few, here and there, of brick; these homes were sedately quiet and sedately lighted. The livery stable was down a short alley on his right, and there was activity there, wagons and horses, and business for the blacksmith. No doubt Smitty Reel was still the man, working in town in the winter and on the Fishhook in the summer. He wondered if the wintering miners in Jordan still called the Fishhook the Broken U, with call-crops now making millionaires. Gold on the hoof.

A man rode by on a trotting horse, a flat-crowned hat low over his face, a sheepskin around his neck. Jeff looked up and saw him, and anger washed through him, a hotness that tested his control, and his hands stirred in his pockets and knotted into fists, and he turned on his heels, watching Ginger Galehouse turn down to the livery barn. But it wouldn't do to worry about that now. Later—some other time—it would come. Sometime, it would come.

He walked away from the hotel, away from the centipede of light that was Silver Street, and left behind the crowds and the laughter and the noise. The snow was now falling more thickly, and the wind had died. He limped along in the middle of the rutty street, until, without looking up, he knew he was there, and he turned in at a white picket fence that stood before a long, low white house, shadowed by a wide gallery.

There was light some place at the back of the house, perhaps in the kitchen. He circled the house quietly in the falling snow, invisible in the starless night, until he had come even with the lighted window; and through it he saw Audrey working in the kitchen, stacking dishes in a cupboard. For a while he stood still, watching her, lulled and warmed by the sight of her far more than he had thought he could be, hungry simply to look at her. The lamplight gleamed softly on her coppery hair, touched and highlighted the curves of her features. Her long dress caught on her heel, and she kicked it free impatiently, with the grace of a wild horse

in the wind. Jeff smiled. She was a little taller, even a little more subtly beautiful, a little more a woman. Jeff shook himself and went to the door.

SHE opened the door without caution in answer to his knock, and stood framed in the funnel of light falling out of the kitchen. She said, "Yes?" On the heels of the word he stepped forward, and her hands touched his coat. "Jeff. Oh, Jeff!" She held herself close to him and kissed him. Jeff felt her face warm against his own. He gripped her elbows and turned her away from him. "Somebody could see us in the light."

She laughed mockingly and pulled him inside and closed the door, color high in her face. "You did come Jeff. You got my letter. You—"

She clung to his arm and smiled at him again, but with a little anxiety now as her dark eyes searched his face. "I didn't really expect you yet. But I knew you would come, sometime." She pulled the heavy coat off his shoulders and hung it over a chair-back.

"You recognized me," Jeff said, watching her. He sat down wearily.

"Yes." She turned and leaned against the long kitchen table, studying him. She laughed. "But now I wonder how. You're awfully different." Jeff grinned. "That's a terrible mustache," she said. "You look as if you're at least fifty." She hoisted herself to the table and sat on its edge, swinging her legs under the long skirt. "Tell me where you were when you got my letter. I wrote it to Shorty Thorn, in El Paso. I knew where he was, and I thought if anyone knew where to find you, he would."

"I was right there," Jeff said. "I've been bunking up with Shorty for a

while. I was there when your letter came."

They were silent for a time.

Audrey smoothed her skirt over her knees and looked down at her hands. "I couldn't have ever said those things in anything except a letter, Jeff. But you knew, anyhow. I know you did."

"Yes," Jeff said. "I did."

"You wanted to marry me," Audrey said, her voice cool but her eyes still lowered, "before—before you left. Now I'm—I'm asking you to, Jeff. That's very shameless, isn't it?"

"No," Jeff said huskily. He reached for his tobacco and dropped it back in his pocket.

"Don't you see? Audrey said. "I waited—I waited to hear from you. I waited for you to write, or come, or send someone. At first I was hurt, and then I was angry, but all the time I knew just what it was." She looked up and met his eyes. "I knew you were afraid to come back for me, because I knew you were afraid I might have changed, over what happened to you."

"No," Jeff said, "I never thought of that."

She said, her voice shadowed: "Then—"

"I didn't come back for the first year because I was on my back in a doctor's house, trying to live. Sometimes I thought of you—" His eyes turned inward, bleak and searching. "Sometimes. When Ginger Galehouse and Waldo Johns got out of the way." He paused and said deliberately: "I didn't live for you. No woman would have kept me alive. I lived to kill two men."

"That is what you really came back for?"

"No. It can wait."

"Then why did you come back at all?"

"I couldn't stop myself. I owed you that much."

"For being in love with someone named Jeff Wells?"

He stood up, a hand slicing the air. "That Jeff Wells is dead. I'm not the same man. Ginger Galehouse killed him, when he put two bullets through his knee and tried to cripple him for life." He moved restlessly across the room and picked up his hat. "I came back because you asked me. I can do that much, at least." He turned to look at her. "Be ready to leave by midnight. I'll be here beside your back door."



Jeff ordered from a barkeep who was new to him.

Illustrated by
John Fulton

She whispered: "But Jeff—" "I'll take you to California. Your father had relatives there."

She jumped down from the table and said hotly: "Why should I go with you, rather than with any other man, if you feel as you say you do?"

"I don't know," Jeff said. "Unless it is that you can still trust me."

"Yes," she said, an odd tone in her voice. "I can believe in you enough for that." Her hands were unsteady. "I'll be waiting."

"Who else is in the house?"

"Only Mrs. Dorsey, and she's deaf. Unless Waldo is in by then—but he seldom is."

He gave her a long slow look and she met it gravely, telling him nothing, and he let himself out the back door and disappeared into the night.

Lilly, on the stage, made the shabby scenery colorful and exciting.

At McLeod's, the show had begun. Jeff limped in and stood against the street wall, looking across the heads of the girls and men at the tables, through the smoke curling up to be caught in the draft of the lamps, at Lilly Argent, on the stage. She made the narrow platform and the shabby scenery merge into something colorful, vast and exciting; her voice made you forget that there were only Professor Yinna at a clanging piano, and a tramp fiddle-player; through her enchantment the packed cow-hands and their girls entered another world, where the fiddle and the piano were a great orchestra, and Lilly Argent sang from a brilliant and magnificent stage.

LILLY ARGENT was a full-busted woman, with high-piled brown hair; and in repose there was nothing about her to mark a difference, as Jeff knew; but in three weeks' association he had not overcome the awe that gripped him at her presence on a stage—where, miraculously, she became as vivid as a scarlet flower, and was all things to all men. Probably not even Lilly herself recognized this powerful intangible as genius; she was privately a somewhat humble but cheerful little woman named Bertha Adams. The "Lilly" had come about as a result of Lilly Langtry's conquest of the West.

"It's the bad men you remember," Lilly sang, *"and the good ones you forget . . . So please don't leave me, darling, oh, please don't leave me yet*



. . . For it's the bad men you remember, and the good ones you forget."

The hall burst into laughter and applause. Professor Yinna stood up from his piano to draw the turkey-red curtains together, and draw them apart again immediately. The applause and yells continued unabated. Somebody smashed a bottle on a table, with a great whoop, and a girl squealed shrilly.

Lilly held out her arms, and her full, round voice, that in a song could run a shiver through your spine, said: "Just rest easy, gentlemen. I'll come back with a song that you'll never forget. Wait for me on this corner, Joe!"

They roared after her, but Professor Yinna dropped the curtain with an air of finality and sat down and began to bang out "The Claybank Skid" on his piano, and Jeff watched the ripple in the curtain announcing the passage of Lilly back to her dressing-room, and then moved back there himself, circling around the walls.

He bent under the curtain and rapped on the door.

"Who are you?" Lilly called.

"Jeff." He opened the door a crack, and Lilly told him to come on in. She had already changed into a blue dress with a gold-thread collar, and was brushing her hair at her mirror.

She said: "That darned curtain keeps knocking my pins out. Mc-

Leod's trying to get me to stay after the show. I don't have to dance with those bowlegged centaurs. I told him I'm through at one o'clock. What time is it now?"

"About ten."

She hummed to herself, brushing rhythmically. "Ah, I love to sing to a crowd like this one, Jeff. How I had them crying awhile ago! With only my second number, too." She put down the brush and coiled her hair around her fingers and selected pins from the table. "Well, I suppose you've been out to see the princess you're bound to rescue."

She turned to look at Jeff, from under a lifted elbow. "I don't understand a boy like you, Jefferson. I've come to believe you're serious for your age."

JEFF chuckled.

Lilly said abruptly: "I expect you've had some trouble, and you've grown up a little quicker than you should have. I'd like to tell you, Jeff: Don't let it make you too tough. But I'm afraid it already has." She went on working with her hair. "I'm not thinking of you. You see, that could make it hard on the young lady." She held hairpins between her lips and spoke around them. "I don't think a nice girl would want a bitter man. You want light and sunshine when you're young, you know."

"You don't think she'd want him," Jeff said, resting against the table.

"I know quite well she wouldn't," Lilly said. "However, it is absolutely none of my business."

"Well," Jeff said, "she doesn't want him, now that she sees him, if that is any comfort to you, Lilly."

She looked at him sharply. "I suppose this is where it happened, is it, in this town?"

"That's right."

"You got in trouble with someone, and I expect you got shot up."

"Yes," Jeff drew a deep breath. "That's about what happened."

"What was it?"

Jeff answered simply, hardly aware that this was the first time he had described it: "It was about Audrey—Audrey Severn, the girl I've come to take away. Her cousin—a man named Waldo Johns—is her guardian."

"I met him tonight. Little fat boy with screwed-up eyes. He owns a store here, and a ranch."

Jeff said: "I thought he'd be at your dinner. He doesn't own a ranch. He bought into the Fishhook spread. It's owned by a syndicate, and Waldo bought into it so he could get me fired. I had a good job there. I was one of the foremen, under Tom Simmons. He's the manager."

"Why, that would be fine," Lilly said. "I suppose a *segundo* would get a little house to live in, where he

could set up housekeeping with his wife? . . . I'm sorry if I said the wrong thing. Don't look so wild."

"I'm not looking wild," Jeff said.

Lilly began to hum, pinning up the final strands of her hair. "I was singing that song before you were born, young man. Isn't it pretty? . . . So Waldo Johns got you fired."

"No, he didn't. Tom Simmons stood up for me. So Waldo went to a friend of his, a man named Ginger Galehouse—a bad-man. Then Waldo picked an argument with me in town, and Ginger Galehouse stepped into it and tried to shoot off my legs."

LILLY stopped working with her hair, and watched him in the mirror. "A friend of mine carried me out of the country. That's all."

"This Waldo Johns did all that because he is this girl's guardian, and didn't want you to marry her?"

Jeff drew in his cheeks and said flatly: "He intends to marry her himself." He built a smoke, carefully. "She is still a minor. She told me in her letter that she tried to leave once, to go to California, and he had her brought back. So someone will have to take her."

"We'll get her to California," Lilly said. "But I'll hate to lose you, Jeff. You're a good hand."

"I'll be with you for a while. I'm no good to do anything else yet. The doctor told me it would be more than a year before I would be able to work. I was lucky to get this job. It would be hard traveling, otherwise."

Lilly sighed. "Well, Mr. Johns has caused a certain amount of blackness to come into the world, and I'm afraid it's here to stay. That's the trouble with such things and such people. Their work is lasting."

"Yes," Jeff said. "It's here to stay."

"But on the other hand, young people often think their lives are ruined, when they're not at all. If they could only see it that way. But then, you have something on your mind beyond just living your life. You have revenge. It isn't enough that you can just take this girl away from him."

"That isn't any part of enough,"

Jeff said slowly.

"I knew it," Lilly said. "You've settled on killing. I was sure that was what it was. I was sure of it." She pushed back her little chair and stood up, distressed. "That won't help you, Jeff."

"I'm not asking for anything to help me."

Lilly sighed again. "Everything after its kind. I'm going out and sing some lovely songs, and you're going to sit here with a long face and murder in your heart."

"I won't sit here," Jeff said. "I'll be up at the bar, eating some supper and listening to you sing."



Jeff leaped back, his hand clawing for his gun.

"That's worse than ever." She hesitated at the door. "So we'll see you tomorrow?"

"There's a man named Daly, a sheep-man, has a place about thirty miles up toward Albuquerque. We'll be waiting there."

"All right." She sighed. "All right, Jefferson. Professor Yinna and I will see to loading the truck in the morning. We should be at this place before dark tomorrow. You take the little wagon, and we'll ride with the freighter. Mr. Johns will never think of his ward running away with our show."

"You're sure going out of your way to help me out," Jeff said.

She patted his hand. "Forget it. That's what comes of my singing the songs I do. When are you leaving?"

"Midnight."

"That's good. Then she'll be missed long before we leave in the morning. Well, *au revoir*, Jeff."

"Whatever that means," Jeff said.

"It means smile, can't you? I hate to see a boy always looking ugly." Lilly went out, and Jeff waited until he heard the shouts that greeted her, and then made his way out.



At a few minutes before midnight Jeff left the little wagon, piled high with buffalo robes, and the blanketed team, a couple of hundred yards from Waldo Johns' white house, where Audrey lived with him and his housekeeper. He went forward on foot, between houses that were now dark, shouldering into a wind that grew steadily stronger and colder. It would be a bad night to try to run them down.

He waited at the back door, shivering a little, shoulders hunched against the wind. The door opened so silent-

ly he didn't hear it, but he sensed Audrey's presence, and turned in the darkness, alert.

She whispered: "Come inside, Jeff. I haven't got everything together yet."

He felt her hand on his, and let her lead him into the warm kitchen. She struck fire to a lamp; it glowed in the room, and brightened; a man's voice swore, and Jeff leaped back to the wall, his hand clawing his coat back from the gun at his belt.

Ginger Galehouse stood across the room, bearded and stoop-shouldered, white-faced, the pupils of his eyes

small and brilliant, his arms bent out from his sides, his whole attitude startled, as though he had just come to his feet from the chair behind him. Waldo Johns, without even the reflexive ability to move, still sat in his chair gaping at Jeff, his mouth open.

"I asked them here," Audrey said calmly. "They've been waiting, Jeff, but they didn't know just what for."

Waldo Johns opened his little pursed-up mouth and said something with a sputtering tongue; and Jeff, his eyes on Galehouse, said: "You wanted to get me killed—is that it?"

"I don't think you realized," Audrey said, "that I asked you to marry me this evening, and you refused, and that that is a terrible thing for any girl."

"For God's sake, you little fool," Waldo Johns said, "there isn't anything in this to be funny about."

Audrey turned with pretended surprise. "No, there isn't. I brought you here for Jeff to kill you, haven't you understood that yet? He's sworn to kill you both. After he's done it, he and I are going away together."

Ginger Galehouse said softly, pressing the words out from between his thin lips: "If you want trouble, Wells, I'll look for you in town tomorrow."

"No," Audrey said. "That won't do at all. Jeff wants trouble now."

Galehouse, who had started to turn carefully for the door, raised his eyebrows and looked at Jeff.

Jeff said to Audrey: "Get out of here."

"Oh, no. I won't leave, Jeff."

His voice rose. "Get out of here!"

"You said you didn't think of me. You said you only thought of them. Well, here they are."

He swore blindly. He turned for the back door, his hand falling away from the butt of his gun. "Galehouse, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Fair enough," Ginger Galehouse agreed. He saw Jeff put his hand on the back door and take a limping step—and he drew and fired point-blank at Jeff's back.

The gun-hammer clicked on an empty chamber; Jeff whipped around

at the small sound. A shot crashed close outside, a windowpane shattered and Ginger Galehouse slammed back against the wall behind him and fell over his chair. Waldo Johns leaped to his feet, yelling wordlessly, and Jeff spun on around, charged savagely out into the night and ran into Slim Bernard.

"I'm cold sober," Slim said, his teeth chattering. He was holding a rifle in his hands. "I'm cold sober, and you never saw me tonight, you game-legged wart-hog. Now I'll get out of here."

Jeff kept a hand on him. "Where the hell did you come from?"

"Why, when a man doesn't recognize his friends, you might think he's got something on his mind, so I've been trailing you around all night in case you might need a little help with whatever it was. And a damned good thing I did. Don't you know better than to turn your back on some people? Now by God, Jeffrey, let me go. I've just killed a man, and I never thought I'd get that drunk."

JEFF turned him loose and Slim disappeared into the darkness, running.

Jeff heard Audrey at the back steps, coming to him. He said: "You emptied their guns."

"I managed to spill coffee on them, and they had to change their shirts—I did it then. You don't think I'd have taken a chance on you getting hurt?"

"You'd have had me kill them unarmed!"

"No, oh, no, Jeff. I knew you wouldn't. Don't you see? That's why I did it. I knew you wouldn't. You're not a different Jeff Wells. You're exactly the same one, only you didn't know it. You could never kill anyone out of a cold hate. You'd have to wait until they forced you to. Fight them, yes; but you're not the killer you've been making yourself miserable imagining that you were. But I had to show you. I had to do it, no matter how scared I was." She crept into his arms, shivering. "I didn't think you'd have someone along with you, Jeff."

"That was Slim Bernard. I didn't know he was there."

"I didn't care," she said. "I didn't care what happened after tonight. I had to show you that you were wrong. I thought they might be afraid, and leave the country before tomorrow. I know Waldo will now. He's gone out of the house already. But I didn't care what happened tomorrow, just so long as I made you understand."

Her voice was muffled against his shoulder. Jeff held her close to him, quieting her. He was thinking that Slim Bernard had recognized him after all, in the hotel bar.



*Audrey crept into his arms.
"Jeff you're not the killer
you've been imagining that
you were."*

WHY not?" quietly remarked the man at the other side of the table. His voice was smooth, even, cultured, and with a peculiarly soothing quality in it. Voices tell character as nothing else does.

"Of course it's impossible," answered Sir Miles Chenieston dreamily. Then he pulled himself together with a start, for the man at the opposite side of the restaurant table was a complete stranger to him. They had not exchanged a word previously. The stranger's remark had fitted in so completely with his "brown study" that his answer had been given quite involuntarily.

Sir Miles looked at him coldly and murmured the conventional: "I'm afraid I have not the pleasure—"

"Nor I," said the stranger. "But it would be a pity to let stupid convention prevent us from being of service to one another. My name is Wycherley, Dr. Xavier Wycherley." He passed over a card. "You were saying that you wished you could only have your life to live over again."

"I said nothing, to the best of my belief. Certainly my thoughts were running in that direction."

"Very much the same thing."

Chenieston stared at him.

"Now you are wondering whether I am a madman, or merely some kind of trickster new to you. Outwardly, I appear to be respectable, and yet—now it is on the tip of your tongue to tell me that I am damned intrusive." He spoke quite quietly, with an undercurrent of gentle irony. Curiously enough, while his eyes were keenly fixed on the baronet, his left hand was engaged in drawing again and again on a wine-list, minute portraits of him, marvelously delicate and accurate. Dr. Wycherley had the faculty of being able to do two things perfectly at the same time.

Chenieston's sense of humor came to his rescue, and he smiled broadly. "I admit it. I feel that convention would expect me to apologize, but I'm not going to do so. It is a damned intrusion, and you know it. Still, let's pass that. You interest me. My name's Chenieston." He took a card from his waistcoat-pocket.

Dr. Wycherley glanced at the proffered card.

"There are not many things that interest you nowadays, Sir Miles. The gaming-table"—he waved his hand in the direction of the neighboring room, packed with fevered humanity crowding over the green field of the goddess Chance—"the gaming-table has no attraction for you, your liquor has lost its savor, your excellent cigar has gone out from want of attention."



The Strange Cases of Dr. Wycherley

By MAX RITTENBERG



YOUR MIND is where you live; and it is because Dr. Wycherley so well understood this fact that he was able to accomplish such amazing feats. Yet do not imagine that his work was concerned merely with visionary matters: on the contrary, his "cases" have always to do with exciting events, stirring scenes and dramatic conflicts.

Chenieston looked at it, and then threw it over the balcony into the palm-gardens below them. "Go on," he said.

"And, as you were saying, you wished you had your life to live over again. The world bores you. There are no surprises left. You have tasted everything. There is nothing left to do. It is satiety. No," he added quickly, "I have not been making inquiries about you beforehand—that passing impression of yours is a mistake, though a pardonable one. Believe me when I say that I have never seen you before this hour, nor did I know your name before you gave me your card."

"I believe you," answered Chenieston. The stranger's voice carried sincerity. "But I must really keep better control of my features. I had flattered myself that my thoughts didn't show on the surface."

"My training has lain in the direction of sensing what is below the surface."

"You are a London specialist, I take it?"

"I am a specialist," answered Dr. Wycherley, putting a shade of emphasis on the word, "but my name will not be found on the British Register, and my field is the world. I am here studying."

"Studying?"

"Men and women. Here at Monte Carlo they unmask. But, as I was saying a few minutes ago, why not live your life over again?"

"*Mephistopheles* is not roaming Monte Carlo," answered Chenieston. "And in any case I don't know that I would care to play *Faust*. The rôle had its drawbacks."

"The drawbacks were due to *Mephistopheles'* ideas of a *quid pro quo*, were they not?"

"I have been frank with you," said Chenieston brusquely, "and I would like you to be equally frank with me. In plain words, what are you driving at?"

Dr. Wycherley looked out over the black, velvety Mediterranean before

answering, sipping his coffee slowly. Then he turned on Chenieston a pair of dark, penetrating eyes, and answered with quiet emphasis, making the simple phrase carry a world of meaning: "I can give you what you desire."

The baronet looked back at him with suspicion in his eyes.

"It's not possible—I don't know you—"

"It is possible," was the stranger's deliberate answer. "Quite possible. I can give you your life to live over again—if you will—but I am not forcing my gifts upon you. One day, perhaps, you may care to come to me. You have my address on the card. I will now bid you good-evening."

He rose and bowed courteously in a half-foreign way. Sir Miles returned his "good-evening," in noncommittal fashion. He followed the doctor with his eyes as he threaded his way through the crowded gaming-room.

What did it mean, thought Chenieston. Of course there was some trickery underlying it. He felt hurriedly for his pocket-book. It was there intact, and he mentally apologized. The man was a gentleman beyond doubt. Suppose it were really possible to—No; the idea was impossibly fantastic—ridiculous!

BUT the idea was not to be dismissed so lightly. When Dr. Wycherley planted his mental seeds, it was with the skill and experience of a master gardener. All through the winter and ensuing spring the idea started up unbidden into Chenieston's consciousness when he was apparently thinking of other matters. During the summer, he fought against the growing obsession—tore up Dr. Wycherley's card, made himself busy with outdoor sports, even tried to interest himself in photography.

His attempt was a failure. The strange doctor had placed a mental finger "on the spot," and his finger pressed upon it ceaselessly. Sir Miles was indeed bored by the world—sa-

tiated at forty-five. He had title, money, wide estates, health—to outward appearance a man to be envied. But he had no wife or child, brother or sister, and with his distant relatives he was out of sympathy. His short married life of many years ago had been a disastrous episode; for his young wife had quickly plunged into the frivolities of a "smart set," against his wishes, until they had drifted further and further apart and love had turned to hatred.

Cheniaston divorced her—for cause—settled a lump sum on her, and put her out of his life. Since then no other woman had made a niche in his heart. His happiness he would entrust to no other's keeping.

But happiness kept to oneself turns sour—like bread hoarded away. He had sought happiness in selfish pleasures, and found only satiety. He had made a wilderness and called it happiness.

At the end of the summer he was shooting—wearily, mechanically, without pleasure—on his Scottish grouse-moor. His house-party included a married couple, the Burtons, whose evident happiness in one another made him bitter. In the gunroom one evening Burton became confidential concerning his wife. Said he:

"The little woman had a bad time of it a year ago; thought I was going to lose her. Nothing organic, you know—mental worry—the loss of our child. Doctors could do nothing. Then we came across an extraordinary fellow—I believe he's got Italian blood in him; anyhow, he made my wife a new woman. Lives in a queer little island on an Italian lake—Isola Salvatore it's called—"

"Name Wycherley?" asked Cheniaston. That had been the solitary address on the doctor's card—Isola Salvatore, and nothing further.

"Yes. By the way, we never mention the child. It belongs to the past. My wife has forgotten."

"Forgotten!" It sounded incredible. "Completely."

OCTOBER on Lake Rovellasco is the picked month of the year. Even Cheniaston, satiated with the glories of the world, felt stirred by the quiet beauty of the scene as he looked out from the window of his hotel by the lakeside. Rovellasco is not yet a tourist center. Presently, perhaps, we shall see blatantly advertised: "A Week in Rosy Rovellasco for Five Guineas!" and then good-by to the quiet scene that Sir Miles gazed on.

At the far end, where the mountains crowd down upon the lake and take it to their arms, was a solitary islet deeply wooded. From amongst the trees peeped out a white glimpse of a villa. Cheniaston's eyes came back to that white spot again and again. Fi-

nally he seemed to arrive at a decision, for he entered his room and started to pack his portmanteau. He was traveling without his man.

He had the bag carried down to the lakeside, and hailed a boatman in halting Italian:

"I want you to row me to Isola Salvatore."

The boatman shrank a little and crossed himself hurriedly.

"I do not like to," he answered. "No one likes to. He sends a boat ashore himself for his visitors. Perhaps if the *signore* will wait—"

Cheniaston unwrapped a couple of five-lire notes from a roll and showed them silently.

The boatman hesitated; his feelings were plainly torn between fear and greed.

Cheniaston took out some further loose change from his trouser-pocket.

"If I do, *signore*, you will not ask me to go set foot on the island."

"Very well," answered Cheniaston curtly, and seated himself in the boat. He felt a natural disgust at the boatman's fear, but at the same time a feeling of something uncanny came down upon his own mind like a mist slowly driving over the hills. This man Wycherley must have queer powers. After a while the baronet endeavored to draw the boatman into conversation, but whenever the questions came round to the subject of Isola Salvatore and its owner, the man evaded them or affected to misunderstand.

As they drew near the islet the boatman suddenly crossed himself and muttered an invocation for heavenly protection.

"What is it?" asked Cheniaston sharply. He strongly objected to all this mystery.

"Look, *signore*! See for yourself!" The man pointed tremblingly at a small dark object tearing through the water around the island.

"It is a dog—that is all," answered Cheniaston. "Why all this fuss about a dog? Certainly it is swimming faster than any dog I have ever seen in the water."

"He is not natural, *signore*! Look, as he approaches, at his eyes!"

The dog tore toward them, but as though unconscious of their presence. The boatman hurriedly rowed out of its way. As it passed, Cheniaston noted with something of a shock that only the whites of its eyes were to be seen, although the eyelids were full open.

"You see, *signore*—he is a hound of hell!"

"Get on," said Cheniaston brusquely.

As they approached a small landing-stage on the islet a servant came to meet them. He was clearly foreign, but spoke English quite adequately:

"My master bids you welcome, Sir Miles. He expects you, but is unfortunately called away at the moment. He asks you to excuse him until this evening."

Cheniaston exhibited no surprise at his name being known to the servant. It would be easily accounted for by some means of communication between the hotel and Isola Salvatore, he thought. He followed the man to the room assigned to him, a room furnished with great simplicity, but equal taste. Its characteristic, as well as the characteristic of the whole house, was restfulness—the atmosphere breathed peace.

Until dinner Cheniaston wandered about the garden of the house—a garden of botanical wonders. The ends of the earth seemed to have been ransacked for strange trees and plants with which to clothe the isle—camphor-trees, pepper-trees, palm trees, trees of strange spices; cedars of Lebanon and deodars from the Himalayas and cryptomerias from the Far East; pines from the Rockies and eucalypti from New Zealand; wonderful vines and creepers everywhere. It was a veritable isle of spices; it breathed of peace and forgetfulness. Cheniaston felt strangely soothed in spirit.

AFTER dinner, simple but in perfect gastronomic taste, the baronet took his cigar to a seat under a giant magnolia, looking over the dark lake and the snowpeaks to the North. He fell into a reverie from which he was roused by suddenly finding Dr. Wycherley smoking beside him in silence.

"Excuse my not coming to welcome you before," said the doctor. "I had to go off to Japan last night—a patient of mine."

"I hope you had a pleasant trip," answered Cheniaston conventionally. Then he became aware of the extraordinary statement made by the doctor, and added hurriedly: "I thought, for the moment, you said Japan."

"Yes; that is what I said—of course, I did not mean in body."

"You seem to have made a curious reputation for yourself in these parts," said Cheniaston, abruptly.

The doctor smiled, and answered with mild irony:

"I treated some of the peasants 'round here—'cast out devils,' and so forth. They were very undecided whether to class me as an archangel or a lieutenant of Lucifer's; finally they settled on the latter."

"Your dog—"

"Ah, yes—you met Rolf taking his four o'clock constitutional. I should explain that he has a perfect horror of the water in the ordinary way. When he was a puppy somebody tried to drown him, and I came to his rescue—nothing will induce him to go into the water now."

"He looked as if he were swimming in his sleep—it was very queer."

"Precisely. Post-hypnotic suggestion—ordered somnambulism, if you prefer it. It is good for his health to take a daily swim. It suggests undeveloped possibilities in everyday life, does it not—draught horses, mules, elephants and so on? You take my meaning?"

With his left hand Dr. Wycherley was making delicate experiments with the almost human leaves of a "sensitive mimosa," though all the time his eyes were fixed on his guest.

Chenieston drew himself together sharply and began:

"That was not quite what I came to see you about."

"There is no need for you to go into a detailed explanation. I sensed that when you arrived at the lakeside yesterday. You want to hear more—to continue our Monte Carlo conversation. Especially you want to know precisely what I can offer you, and, to put it bluntly, what my terms are."

"There seems no need for me to hold up my side of the conversation."

Dr. Wycherley smiled again.

"Not just at present. This is of course elementary and quite preliminary. Later on, should you wish to try the experiment, I shall ask you to talk for days at a time. To begin with, what are my terms for giving you your life over again? Not money, for of that I have ample for my simple needs. Not influence or power, for that I can build for myself. No; my demands are less material." He paused.

"Well, what can I give you?"

"Data."

"I don't follow you."

"Scientific data—material for my life-work, psychological research. I should ask you to report progress. To bring, say twice a year, the book of your life for my inspection. *I want to know what a man would do with his second life.*"

"THERE are devilish possibilities in that," answered Chenieston, setting his teeth.

"Precisely. If I don't inspire you with confidence, you would be an utterly weak fool to trust yourself in my hands for an instant. If I were a poor man, the temptation might be irresistible; if I were a criminal man, the consequences might be horrible; if I were an enemy of society, the consequences might be appalling. It is for you, a man of the world, to make up your mind what sort of a man I am. On the one hand you have the evidence of the peasants around here; on the other hand—"

"I met the Burtons," interrupted Chenieston.

"That was a very simple case—like the amputation of a finger to a sur-

geon. Your case, I would warn you frankly, would be more in the nature of a major internal operation. Have you the courage?"

"Explain to me what you would do."

Dr. Wycherley then threw away his cigarette.

"Let us get at fundamentals—let me show you the psychological basis of happiness. Happiness is just contentment—neither riches nor power can of themselves give a man happiness. Happiness comes from within. The world laughs at the millionaire who says that he wishes he were poor and obscure, but *he* speaks from bitter experience. He has bought dearly the knowledge I now place before you. Happiness is just contentment, and contentment is illusion. Contentment sees the good and ignores the evil. Contentment forgets. Contentment makes every day a new age, a wonderful experience opening out vistas of a rose-strewn future. *You* live in the past; every new experience as it arises is stale to you because you mentally compare it with the past. You have seen everything, tasted everything, done everything. Your experience is a daily curse to you.

"Now suppose you could *forget* all that had happened to you from twenty-one to—shall we say forty-five? The world would be a new place to you; your life would be before and not behind you. You would be a young man in mind again."

"But not in body."

"No; one cannot altogether put back the development of the body. But 'a man is as young as he feels' is an old saying, and a very true one. I know boys of fifty—I expect you know some also. The mind reacts on the body."

"To have a blank page from twenty-one to forty-five would hold its disadvantages," said Sir Miles thoughtfully.

"Precisely. Therein lies the difficulty of the operation. One has to cut out only what is deleterious. It is like removing a great cancerous growth from the body. One must use the scalpel very warily. It is not an operation for the raw medical student. You place your mental life in the hands of the trained surgeon—if you have faith in him. That is why I said a little while ago that I should ask you to talk for days at a time. Your past life would have to be laid bare to me, and to my judgment you would confide the decision of what should be cut out and what left in place. There is the matter in a nutshell."

"You propose to hack at my mind, my Ego, my individuality?"

"There you betray an ignorance of psychology. You confuse several distinct issues. I cannot touch your Ego or higher self—we call it the 'conscious-

ness.' I can only operate on your lower self, the 'sub-consciousness,' the warden of your memories. In the hypnotic state we converse and treat only with the patient's sub-consciousness."

"Then where does the higher self go to?"

"Where does it go to in sleep? I ask you in return. But let me lend you a scientific book tonight which will put the matter before you in detail."

"Thanks," said Chenieston. "I will read it. Tomorrow I will give you my decision."

IN after days the month Chenieston spent on Isola Salvatore seemed to him like a hazy dreamland. He remembered vaguely that Dr. Wycherley had placed him at evenfall of the second day under the great magnolia, stretched out in a gloriously easy chair, and had suspended in front of and above him an imprisoned firefly. On this he had to concentrate his gaze until tired eyelids closed down over his tired eyes. Meanwhile the doctor was talking to him—quietly, smoothly, soothingly. Sleep had stolen upon him—restful, heavenly sleep.

He had no direct knowledge of what had happened to him in sleep, but Dr. Wycherley had told him that he was then talking *en rapport* with his sub-consciousness for hours at a time, bringing out his past life, ordering forgetfulness of this, allowing remembrance of that.

The month was to Chenieston at once an eternity and a moment.

In the intervals between the hypnotic trances he had written and signed long documents for the instruction of his lawyers, his bankers and his stewards, directing the disposal of his estates amongst his distant relatives and various charities, should he not return again to his world. He was to give out that he had gone to a vague somewhere to shoot big game—a handy excuse—and he was to start life afresh under a new name and with a few thousands capital only. He was to be one of the world's workers.

He began to grow a beard to change his outward identity, and Dr. Wycherley spent long hours training up within him a new voice while in the hypnotic state. Change the voice, and you make a man unrecognizable to his friends.

When Stephen Carruthers—this was the name agreed upon—left Isola Salvatore he staggered mentally as a man staggers bodily when he leaves the nursing-home. His past life was mainly a blank to him, though certain memories remained which Dr. Wycherley had judged advisable. There were sudden gaps in his memory stitched together and working unsmoothly, as the muscles work unsmoothly where the surgeon has used

the knife. Queer flashes of unconnected incidents came upon him every now and then, dazzling him. He felt horribly helpless.

The doctor accompanied him to land and stayed with him for months while they roamed the Continent together. Gradually Carruthers began to feel his feet—to speak metaphorically—and a great happiness surged upon him. Everything was new, fresh, unexplored. The Riviera had before seemed to him a pleasure-city painted like the cheeks and lips of a painted woman—a horrible, rouged outrage upon Nature; now he saw the good and not the evil, and it was fresh to him and very pleasant to his eyes. The blood within him danced and sparkled like champagne. He thought and spoke as a youngster fresh from college.

Carruthers was a new man.

At the age of forty-five to outward appearance—a man cannot very well study for and enter one of the close professions. The few oldish men who do walk the hospitals or eat dinners at the Temple are regarded by the world with good-natured, rather contemptuous pity. Carruthers, finding himself in possession of a few thousand pounds only, insufficient to live on idly but offering possibilities for earning an income, chose to enter business, which has no age-barrier.

He returned to London. As far as his memory went, he had not seen it since he was a boy of twenty-one or so, and to his eyes great changes had taken place. They struck him sharply like a blow in the face delivered in the dark—at first he was confused and deafened.

Queer flashes of sub-conscious memory stirred him to actions which were meaningless to his understanding. One day, for instance, he found himself walking mechanically up the steps of a mansion in Berkeley Square and ringing the bell. A butler appeared and asked him his business. Suddenly—to his painful confusion—Carruthers discovered that he had no business there, had no reason to be walking up those steps and ringing that bell. He pulled himself together and, for the sake of saying something, asked if the master of the house were in. The butler, looking at him suspiciously as some one of dubious intentions, replied that Sir Miles Chenieston was abroad, and edged him down the steps again. The name seemed somehow familiar to Carruthers, but he could not place the connection. It was one of many worrying episodes.

With part of his money he bought a share in a small publishing firm, and in the interest of the work the scars in his memory smoothed out of conscious thought. The semi-professional aspect of the publishing business appealed to his natural instincts, and

since his partner—Bailey by name—was easy to get on with, the work gave him keen pleasure. "Office hours" meant nothing to him; often he would stay on at Booksellers' Row long after the clerks had left and the neighboring offices were cold and dark, and the gray ghosts of little old caretakers came out of their daylight hiding-places to dust and sweep. He was keen to build up the business into a large organization.

"How young you are!" said Bailey to him one day, half chaffingly, half enviously. "I declare you make me feel like an old fogey."

"I am young," answered Carruthers. "Why shouldn't I be? Everything is so new and fresh—life rushes into one full tide. Isn't it the same with you?"

"I wish I knew your secret."

"What secret?" Carruthers felt, for a brief fraction of a second, a queer mental confusion that was like a sudden stab of pain. "I haven't got secrets, my dear fellow."

"I only meant the secret of your perpetual youth," his partner hastened to explain. The subject was dropped.

TWICE a year, spring and autumn, Carruthers took a holiday from work and journeyed to the islet on Lake Rovellasco in unconscious fulfillment of his contract with Dr. Wycherley. Some force within him impelled him to steep himself in the waters of peace, to feel the garden of spices close around him and take him to itself in an ecstasy of joy unutterable. He yielded himself to the soothing passes of the psychologist—all unconscious, he laid bare his soul to the gaze of Dr. Wycherley, who studied him as the biologist studies the growth of some strange new organism.

In his waking intervals Carruthers fished, bathed, rowed about the lake. He made great friends with Rolf, who, barring only the bath, was ready to accompany him anywhere. Rolf was a big, shaggy-haired English sheep-dog.

It was on one of these lake excursions that Helen Mannering came into Carruthers' life. The occasion was pure chance—one of those sudden squalls that occasionally sweep down in fury on Lake Rovellasco from the snow-peaks and toss the waters as a farmer pitchforks the hay. She was alone in a light skiff with a local boatman, who unexpectedly lost his oar, and losing his nerve with it, implored help from above.

Carruthers, not far off, saw the danger and rowed hard to help, Rolf barking eagerly from the front seat. Nothing could have been worse for the boatman's peace of mind. Abandoning the other oar, he groveled on the floor of the boat, while the waves slapped in angrily.

"Can you catch a rope?" shouted Carruthers.

Mrs. Mannering pluckily climbed over the prostrate boatman to the front of the skiff, caught the rope not unskillfully, and tied it to a ring. With the skiff in tow, Carruthers faced the wind and kept head to waves for an hour or more until the squall died away and the sun came out to smooth down the waters.

It was natural for Carruthers to call at her hotel the next day to make polite inquiries. But it was more than mere politeness that took him—he had felt strangely attracted toward this woman no longer young, no longer beautiful, and occupying the position of a paid nurse to a testy old gentleman with half a dozen imaginary ailments. Something stronger than himself made him linger beyond the time of a conventional call—made him row over to land next day, and the day after, contrive to meet Helen Mannering on the water-front where the tourist shops display their allurements and all the little world of Rovellasco saunters.

He even suffered gladly the querulous egoism of Colonel Padgett so that he might be near Mrs. Mannering. Dr. Wycherley, to whom nothing was hidden, spoke to him in gentle sympathy one evening when Carruthers sat musing under his favorite magnolia-tree.

"A woman in a thousand," said the doctor.

"In a million," answered Carruthers.

There was silence, a silence of mutual understanding.

"Why not?" asked the doctor. His sensitive left hand was rapidly drawing tiny portraits—perfect miniatures—of Mrs. Mannering on a scrap of paper.

"Yes; why not?" echoed Carruthers. "It's a dog's life for her. I could make her ideally happy. There is sympathy between us beyond anything I have ever felt. You believe in the idea of one's affinity, doctor?"

"I do not know," returned Dr. Wycherley gravely and slowly. "As a scientist, I say that I do not know. One feels that it is true, but there is no evidence. If there is only one affinity for each of us in all this wide world, what are the chances of meeting? Infinitesimal. No; there is no evidence. It is one of my problems."

So Carruthers took courage in hand, and contrived his opportunity. He spoke deeply and passionately, breathing fast:

"Colonel Padgett tells me that you are moving soon. I mustn't wait, I mustn't let this opportunity slip by. Helen, since the world began, we were made for one another—every fiber in me tells me that it is true. I am full-tide with happiness, but it must be shared, and with you only can I share it. I cannot give you wealth or position, but I can give you all that is best in myself. Will you take me as I

am? Look me in the eyes and read my love."

He caught at her hands. She drew them away and, to his astonishment, began to weep softly but as though her heart were broken.

"I can't; I can't!" she answered. "Don't you see or feel? Has love made you blind?"

"But I don't understand. Do you mean that you are tied—that you have a husband alive? I understood that your husband was dead. Or is your love given elsewhere?"

"No, no!"

"Be frank with me, Helen. Be fair to me. Have I been too impetuous; am I selfish in pressing my love upon you before your answering love has had time to grow?"

She looked out upon the witchery of night on lake and mountain, as though to seek inspiration or courage from them, and when at length she turned to him again, her voice was firm with resolve:

"What you have said has done me honor. Don't think that I rate lightly what you have offered me. But you are not yourself—this is a moment of madness. Were I to accept, it might mean a lifetime's misery—for both of us. Look me in the eyes, look at me well!"

Carruthers looked, puzzled, confessed himself at sea:

"I don't understand. I only see what is very beautiful to me and what I hold very dear. My love, I see you for what you are, and with that, a lifetime would hold no regrets."

"Give me until tomorrow," said Helen suddenly. Joyfully he acquiesced, and in the moonlight saw her back to her hotel.

"In the morning I come for my answer," he murmured.

BUT in the morning he found only Colonel Padgett, raging fussily:

"By gad, sir, it's outrageous, positively outrageous! Runs away without saying a word—leaves me to shift for myself! Don't you realize, sir, that she was paid, *paid* to look after me? How am I to go for my morning walk? This will make me seriously ill! I'm feeling damnable twinges already; I never heard of anything so heartless in all my born days. It's outrageous, sir, positively outrageous! I'll put the police on her track! Leaves me a note to say that she has to run away—gives no reason—gives no address. I'll report her to the nursing agency; I'll have her cashiered! I never heard of anything so disgraceful!"

"Did Mrs. Mannerling leave any note for me?" interrupted Carruthers.

"How do I know? D'you think I've had any time to—"

But Carruthers had made off to the hotel bureau, where the cashier handed him an envelope, which he tore open

eagerly. It contained only a little bag of dried herbs and a brief note:

All night I have wrestled with temptation, Miles. I have fought and conquered; I will not spoil your life again. This little bag of herbs will explain everything to you. "Rosemary for remembrance." Good-bye!

HELEN.

He put the bag—*her* bag—to his lips, and in his brain there was as it were a snapping and rending of the stitches that bound up the wounded memory. He had known that little bag of dried herbs before. But where—where? In Heaven's name, where? He felt the question was driving him mad—the torture was unbearable. At the railway-station he found she had taken ticket for Milan. There was no train in that direction till the afternoon. At Milan she might take train again to anywhere. What could he do?

Then the soothing shadow of the psychologist came over the glare in his mind, and he rowed feverishly back to Isola Salvatore. Dr. Wycherley's eyes lighted up with the enthusiasm of the scientist as Carruthers explained and showed him the letter.

"Splendid! Splendid!" said the doctor. "Your experience is the first direct evidence of the affinity theory, that, so far as my knowledge goes, has ever been obtained. This is well worth the trouble of the experiment!" Then he added, with his gentle, ironic touch: "The zeal of the scientist—it forgets the patient! Excuse me, Carruthers, for my scientific selfishness. Be quite easy in mind—I will surely find her for you. If you let me put you to sleep, it will soothe the brain."

"But how can you find Helen? She has deliberately run away. She will cover up her tracks."

"The bag of herbs," answered the doctor. "It is very personal to her. It is charged with her personality. Rolf!"

The big dog trotted up to him.

"Sleep!" commanded Dr. Wycherley, sharply.

Instantly the dog rolled over on its side, inert.

"His suggestibility is very highly developed," explained the doctor, while with his left hand he made rapid little sketches of Rolf in a half-dozen different attitudes. "Nowadays a mere command will send him into deep hypnosis. It took me a long, long while to train him. At one time I nearly gave it up in despair; then I hit on a new way to— But this will not interest you. I will just say briefly that in hypnosis proper, the hyperæsthesia of the senses is of the order five to ten in men and women—that is, their sense perceptions become five to ten times keener than in the normal working state. This is a matter of everyday knowledge. But what is not generally known is the effect in the case of ani-

mals. I have found most astonishing magnification of the senses. With Rolf, the hyperæsthesia in hypnosis is of the order twenty-fold and more. I will take him to Milan and start him on the trail. He will succeed. Watch."

He put the bag of herbs to Rolf's nose, and the dog at once jumped up and began with closed eyes uncannily to nose the garden for a trail.

"Stop!" commanded the doctor, and the dog obediently stood still, rigid.

"Now let me put you to sleep," suggested Dr. Wycherley gently, and Carruthers acquiesced.

WHEN Carruthers woke again, he found Helen by his side, watching him in silence. He held out his arms.

"You are back again. Thank God!"

"Wait!" said Helen. "Let me explain. Don't you really know me, Miles? Dr. Wycherley tells me you have forgotten."

"Miles! Why do you call me Miles?"

"I was your wife. I was very young and very foolish. If only you had been a little more patient! Or I more controlled! It was a very little thing that caused the first breach between us. You remember the night I wanted to go to the Hilary ball—what an age ago it seems—and you—"

"I don't remember anything like that. Surely you are imagining—"

"You divorced me."

"How could I? I only met you on the lake—"

"You gave me a sum of money for my maintenance, but a few years after I was tricked out of it by a Continental swindler. I was forced to turn to and earn my living, and I took up nursing as a profession. Naturally I changed my name. When I met you here at Rovellasco, I didn't recognize you at first—you have changed so, Miles—but eventually the little mannerisms, the little tricks of speech told me it was you. That night on the terrace you used the same words as when—"

"But I don't remember! What does it all matter?"

"You divorced me," she answered slowly, "and you had cause."

"But I don't remember. Can't you see, Helen, that I don't *want* to remember? Some one told me some time that to forget is to be happy. He was right. I want only you, Helen, you as you are today, as I feel and know you are. What has the girl you speak of to do with the woman I love today? She belongs to the past—you belong to the present and the future—"

"We have to live with our past, Miles."

"A horrible creed! A devilish creed! Let the dead past moulder with its dead! Say, rather, we have to live with our future. That is my creed—will you make it *yours*, Helen?"

Helen bent down and kissed him.



The BATTLE *for*

BEING Norman Shane's confidential secretary, I was with him in London when the French trouble broke. He had accomplished the task of persuading England to the decisions of the Freedoms Coalition, as the press called that movement of influential men all over the world, who had banded together in an organization of vast influence to secure the Four Freedoms and the International Court of Justice.

Norman Shane was the leader of this world-group, at the moment. Following the war, the peace conference

was in session at Vienna, the Asiatic Congress at New Delhi. Once the International Court was firmly in control, war was ended; and freedom from aggression, the greatest of the Four Freedoms, would be achieved; this was the object of the Coalition. But it was hard to obtain. Already the reactionaries, the vested interests of the great powers, were in violent opposition.

Facing us was the almost impossible task of bringing France into line. This was just after the attempt on the life of the King of Italy; we did not dream that it was connected with our work, however.

Georges de Morant, leader of the popular party in France, dropped in on Shane in London and spoke with frank pessimism. We knew that since the war the popular hero of France, Durochel, had been seized with delusions of grandeur and was practically a dictator. But we were not prepared for the discouragement with which Morant, one of the finest Frenchmen alive, viewed the situation.

"You have no chance," he said gloomily. "You represent powerful, idealistic forces throughout the world. Your object is to put through the program of peace and freedom for all



FRANCE

The Freedoms Coalition fights to win the peace.

by *Gordon Keyne*

people and establish the International Court. But can you do it?"

"We must," said Shane. "The Court is functioning now. We've won the war, and we cannot lose the peace."

Morant shook his head. "You have no chance," he repeated. "You're working behind the scenes. How you accomplished your amazing success here in England, I don't know. But you can't repeat it in France. Durochel is firmly in power. His policy is the expansion of France, the regaining of her colonial empire; with him stand all the selfish forces of greed and reaction. Further, these same forces

everywhere in the world are tied in with him and are backing him. My friend, there is a vast conspiracy afoot!"

"Yet you are with us, and other Frenchmen."

MORANT smiled, a trifle sadly. "Oh, yes! I'm an idealist. I prefer to perish rather than see the old pre-war conditions return, to end in another war. I'm with you to the finish, and there are plenty of us. But I am frightened by the resurgence of evil. I think that I shall be killed, and that you will also perish."

He was a shrewd man; to hear his conviction of failure and doom, was frightening.

Shane, gaunt and rugged, sat rubbing his big nose with his hairy paw, his deep eyes thoughtful but unperturbed. His whole life was devoted to this cause. Not yet forty, he looked over sixty. He had suffered, he was alone in the world; yet he possessed that tremendous force of magnetism, of deep wisdom, of some intangible power, which made him what he was.

His task was to dictate, without compromise, the peace terms on behalf of the Freedoms Coalition and the gov-



Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

*"I'm forced by circumstances
outside my control, to work
against you, Norman."*

ernments which had subscribed to this Coalition.

You will recall those bitter months of the transition period, when the peace delegates at the Vienna Conference were gabbling and squabbling; and when Kessiloy, the great Russian who had succeeded the war-weary Stalin, was so firmly guiding the course of Asiatic destinies at New Delhi. Without Kessiloy, the world might have crashed into ruin during those months.

The first general terms of the Four Freedoms had encountered few obstacles. The doctrine of peace and freedom was being nominally enforced by the commission system. A commission of three men, appointed by the International Court, now sat in every country of earth; but its power was tentative. The Court had disarmed all forces save its own, with a guarantee of freedom to each national group, but it was not yet firmly in control.

Reaction was showing itself on every hand. Greed, selfishness, hatred, were waging a fight against the rights of man. Norman Shane had behind him mighty, intangible forces—key men everywhere fighting for ideals, social justice, tolerance and brotherhood, the end of all war. Whether these would conquer, remained to be seen.

The phone rang. I sat down to the instrument.

"This is Mr. Hammond speaking—Mr. Shane's secretary. Who is it?"

Her voice came to me. I knew it at once—that voice of magic which had so helped us in the first stage of our work.

"Good morning, Mr. Hammond. This is Vera Ley. It is most important that I talk with Mr. Shane before he reaches Paris."

"One moment. He's engaged; I'll ask him."

I went to Shane with the word. At the name of Madame Ley, Morant started. Shane passed a hand over his weary eyes.

"I can't refuse her, Ham, but every moment is tied up. We leave Croydon at noon tomorrow; ask if she'll fly over with us. Try to get a hint of what's up."

I DID as he requested. Madame Ley was delighted. She accepted the invitation, but at my question she laughed softly.

"Tell Mr. Shane that I want something from him. It's connected with the lost killers of the Gestapo," she said, and rang off abruptly.

I repeated her words; we had no secrets from Morant. Shane, indeed,

had no secrets from anyone, which was a source of strength to him.

"Good God!" ejaculated Morant. "This woman—does she know of those men? Can she tell us where they are?"

"Perhaps." Shane drew down his shaggy brows. "Let's pool our knowledge of her, Morant. She's the widow of that Soviet field-marshal, Voldimir Ley, who was killed in Siberia. When I was ill in Paris some months ago she saved my life; yet I know little of her. She seems to have great influence and ability. She's well disposed toward me. Yet my guess is that she's lined up with our enemies and is vitally dangerous."

Morant agreed. "She is a mystery. No one knows much about her. I'm certain she is friendly with Durochel and has high connections. Yet—if we could put our hands on those Gestapo killers! If we only could!"

His excitement was justified.

It will be remembered that, following the Nazi collapse and the frightful slave-uprisings and massacres in Germany, the old Gestapo was mercilessly wiped out; but a handful of the leaders escaped. Some were captured, tried and executed, but half a dozen were never located. Despite the huge rewards offered, despite the intensive search, they remained at liberty. Rumor said that they had got away with a couple of armored planes, before the world-wide Air Control took over, but nothing certain was known.

"If the International Court of Justice could grab those devils and put them on trial—ha! That'd be worth while!" said Shane. "Do you actually know anything about Madame Ley?"

"I know that she helped Durochel to power," Morant replied. Shane looked thoughtful.

"Well tomorrow will tell. Now let's get down to work."

Work they did, for the rest of the day. Morant was thoroughly in agreement with us and so was a majority in France; but Durochel's position as Premier of the Fourth Republic was terribly strong. If our Freedoms Coalition got the International Court to clamp down on him without a plebiscite, it might mean a revolt that would destroy the Court; we dared not risk it. This would be exerting the very tyranny we were out to destroy. Yet France was still too agonized from the Nazi occupation, and too corrupt, to trust to a plebiscite.

"I fear," said Shane reflectively, "that only some event of the first magnitude, some happening that would outrage and shock the world, can help us here—"

"You have something in mind?" Morant struck in.

"Good God, no! The situation is dynamite; I'm afraid to think what might happen! No, I shall have to see what I can effect personally with Durochel."

"And you see him—when?" The question made Norman Shane smile faintly at me; he had, at least, made the Frenchman come to him, as was his custom.

"He comes to our hotel, the Parc Monceau, Saturday evening—tomorrow."

"Hm! I'm flying back tonight. Shall we meet on Sunday afternoon, say? I can have the information you require, and the desired pledges from our provincial key men. And I'll try to bring De Gaulle with me."

So it was agreed, and Morant left.

WE hoped for much from De Gaulle. This war leader of the Fighting French had dropped out of sight with the peace, refusing to take any share in politics; but his influence was still great, and as he was a friend of Morant we had hopes of winning him over to our side.

And Madame Ley? We could not tell. "She's an angel incarnate," Norman Shane had once declared to me, "but whether she's playing the devil's game, I don't know. Nobody knows."

We were soon to learn.

I wanted to ask Shane more about the shocking event he feared. Something in his air had frightened me. He was a man to make astonishing plans far in advance; but in this case I knew it must be some intuition, some premonition, that had come into his mind. However, I dared not develop the subject or dwell upon it, lest it take too much emphasis in his mind; it was my place to subdue his worries, not excite them.

We left for Paris from the splendid new Croydon airport. Our plane was the golden-hued Starbeam placed at Shane's disposal before we left New York. It had Captain Mark Smith, the veteran ace, as pilot, and a crew of three. Madame Ley showed up literally at the last moment, after we were aboard. She had no luggage except a handbag. She came aboard, Shane brought her into the cabin and she greeted me; then we fastened our belts and were off.

It was my first real sight of this remarkable woman; at our prior meeting I had seen little of her. Superficially, she was a smallish woman beautifully formed, with olive oval features and large eyes of deep blue. It has been said that she was alive with kinetic energy, but this is untrue. She was quiet, gentle, unforceful in any way. I would have put her down as twenty-five, at the most. She wore black, with no jewels.

Yet, from the very first word, one felt her; she impacted on nerves, senses, emotions, thoughts. She, like Norman Shane, radiated a vibrant unnamed force.

And she lost no time in getting down to business. Scarcely had we leveled out when she asked Shane for a private interview. He refused flatly; he was, as I could tell, very much on his guard, and on a bit of tension.

"Quite impossible, Vera. I see no one privately; Hammond stays. Now go ahead."

She flashed me a smile. "Oh, very well! I warned you that I wanted something from you! But first, because I admire and respect you, I'd like to make my position clear. I'm forced by circumstances outside my control, to work against you, to harm you, even to hurt you, Norman."

She paused, meeting his grave, deep gaze, then went on:

"Yet wherever possible, I want to save and help you. Does it sound fantastic? It's not, really; it's terribly simple, but I can't explain now. I'm forced to do much that I would not if I could help it."

"I believe you," Shane said quietly. "Some months ago you were in Paris, critically ill," she said, and waited.

That was before Norman Shane had undertaken his present work, of course; at the time he had lost everything and was down and out.

"I heard of your illness, had you cared for, nursed you, flew Vienna's finest specialist to your bedside. Not because I wanted anything; I knew little of you, but I did feel sorry for you, a poor sad man who needed the will to live. And I helped you to get that back, too."

Norman Shane stirred. "I owe you much, much!" he exclaimed. "An obligation I can never sufficiently re-

pay, Vera! Yes, a personal debt of the deepest; I admit it freely."

"Recently, in London, I was forced to work against you; yet I managed to help you accomplish your objects there," she pursued. "This was, deliberately, to put you under added and impersonal obligations. And today I am in a position to inform you of plans now under way to assassinate you within a few days. You, Norman, and others."

FOR me, at least, this was a facer. To guess what she was driving at was impossible. She was, she must be, above any cheap bargaining, any *quid pro quo*. Shane regarded her fixedly, his rugged features now like rock.

"Neither you nor other creatures of finite power can dictate life and death, Vera."

She laughed a little—that soft, delicious laugh of sheer wizardry.

"But a woman can have a lot to say, Norman! Yes, I want something. Suppose I asked you to get your occupation committees withdrawn from the new Baltic state confederation?"

He did not see, at first, that she was merely jesting lightly.

"Quite impossible, Vera. Upon every state and people rests its own responsibility. A commission of three of our Army officers is stationed there under authority of the International Court— You are not serious, I see." He forced a troubled smile. "Come to the point, my dear Vera! I owe you much, but personal debts are not public issues."

"They may be made so. Very well, let us speak of that wretched boy, Georg Voss, who tried to assassinate the King of Italy."

Here was a startling shift of topic; now what was she driving at?

There was nothing new in the case; indeed, it had just been concluded. The boy, a wild young fanatic, had thrown a bomb that missed its royal mark but killed several of the king's suite. He had been tried and sentenced to death, and our commission in Rome had approved the sentence.

"I believe," said Norman Shane, "he's to be executed on Monday. What about him?"

"He has refused to say a word about his accomplices, you recall?" she said, and Shane nodded. "Well, Norman, this unhappy boy was used as a tool. By whom? According to my information, which is accurate, by a number of those lost Gestapo killers."

Here was electrifying news with a vengeance! Shane straightened up.

"Ha! You think young Voss could lead us to those relics of Hitler's hideous rule?"

"Yes, undoubtedly. But it will take time to work on him properly; a month, say. And time lacks. They've refused any stay of execution. But

you, Norman, could so easily gain a reprieve of a month!"

Shane relaxed. "I could, but I'll not. The reason's not sufficient to justify such action on my part."

She leaned forward earnestly. "I could offer you much! I'd give much to see these Nazi killers run down!"

"So would I, Vera, but I'm not in the bargain business. I'm dictating the policy which the Coalition of the Four Freedoms wants followed—that's all. Much as I'd like to have you with us, I'll make no dicker with anyone, buy no one. The world is through with all that."

Our co-pilot called on the interphone and asked if we would like luncheon served.

"Yes, thanks," replied Shane. "Let's have it now."

Madame Ley leaned back, smiling. "Very well, Norman. I'll offer you nothing at all—nothing! But I think you'll change your mind when I give you one more reason, after luncheon. Until then, forget it!"

She, at least, forgot it and became the most charming person imaginable, chatting about people and events, imparting much that was news to us. Her intimate knowledge of affairs was extraordinary. She had even been recently in the United States, and spoke with insight of the terrible problems beginning to confront us at home. When Shane spoke of taking up these matters in due course, she broke into a silvery laugh.

"Oh, you Americans! You're repeating the very mistake you made in prolonging the war with Japan! When will you learn that the only way to kill an octopus is at the center, not at the tentacles? You always wait, wait to get ready—"

"We finished the Japs when we were ready, didn't we?" he demanded. "Patience, my dear Vera, is a great weapon. Patience and composure are two of the strongest forces existent. The press is raging now because the period of transition is passing and nothing seems to happen at Vienna or New Delhi. Well, wait and see! Much is happening elsewhere."

SO it went, until luncheon was finished, and with France flowing past underneath, we settled down for a smoke. Then Madame Ley gave Shane a long, intent look.

"And so we come back to the unfortunate young man in Rome, Norman."

"Eh? Oh, that chap Voss!" Shane smiled. "What makes you think I'll change my mind about getting the reprieve for him?"

"Because Georg Voss is my son."

If she was after dramatic effect, she got it. It seemed impossible that this woman could be the mother of a nearly grown son. At our startled incred-

ulity, a slight sad smile came to her lips; she warmed, melted, was transfigured. She was not playing a rôle now. I had not dreamed she could be so rarely beautiful; I saw now why Shane had called her an angel incarnate. She went on speaking.

"His real name is Georg Ley; I was married very early, you see. I do not ask you to save the boy's life; he must pay for what he has done. But the reprieve would mean everything to me, Norman. A month can be so long! All I ask of you, now or later, is this one kind action. It will be well repaid, if he can be made to reveal the secret of those Gestapo killers."

Shane said nothing for a long moment. Then he reached out to the interphone and spoke with the copilot.

"I want to get a message through to General Louis Roberts of the International Court of Justice committee in Rome. At once."

The smoky pall of Paris was in sight when the reply came from Roberts, in Rome. The reprieve would be granted. She took Shane's hand and thanked him; tears were in her eyes. Then, as we circled above Le Bourget, she repeated her singular statement:

"Please believe me, Norman. When you hear the worst of me, when I seem to be your ungrateful enemy—it is not my doing. I am forced to choose between evils; actually, I shall be fighting for your cause. In proof of this, I shall phone you this evening as soon as I learn the details of the plan to remove you and Georges de Morant."

This was a startling fillip. . . .

We landed. A car was awaiting her; she was whisked away at once. Another car awaited us; Norman Shane would never permit welcoming committees of any sort. As we were driven into Paris, he gave me one of his grim, steady looks.

"A strange experience, Ham. You heard it all. Have you figured where the catch comes in?"

"I'd hate even to think there was one," I replied. "She was desperately in earnest."

He shook his head. "She spoke the truth, yes; but I fell into a trap. I can sense it, feel it! Yet, knowing this, I'd do the same thing over again." He sighed. "Well, no doubt we'll learn in time. A strange woman! A woman of power, of sorrow, of vast ability."

The same, I thought, could be said of him; but Shane had something beyond—the mental integrity and the uplift of unseen forces, those "myriad powers that do guard the stars." Man's belief in devils has never faltered, but it took the last war to foster his realization of the corresponding powers of divinity.

That afternoon, comfortably ensconced at the Parc Monceau, we

buckled down to work. Norman Shane was in superb fettle; he solved problems, settled disputes, cut through tangles right and left. We got off radios and cables, and Kessiloy put through a phone call from New Delhi in regard to the Egyptian situation, which was having serious repercussions in Asia because of the Moslem attitude. Shane told him we would be in Cairo in a few days to settle affairs—as, indeed, we thought would be the case.

So the board was cleaned for the evening meeting with Durochel.

He came, bringing a secretary whom Shane refused to admit. For an instant Durochel flared up; it was unfair, considering my presence! Shane ignored the protest. Then Durochel submitted and the three of us settled down to the discussion—or he and Shane did.

FOR fifteen minutes all was smooth, suave talk. The big dark Norman, whose left hand had been shot away in the war, bulked large and impressive and solid. He was still a popular hero in France, all fascist elements were behind him, and even the republicans had split on the rock of his colonial empire policy.

Yet, in another half hour, his suave politeness was ripped away, the man himself was laid bare and quivering in Gallic rage; he lost his head and admitted his own ambition. Norman Shane simply discarded all pretense, refused any sort of bargain, delivered his dictation and told Durochel to step down. He was like granite.

With his remarkable gift of foreseeing each enemy move and preparing its counter-move, Shane had arranged each detail of the discussion; it was almost uncanny. Even the difference in time between Paris and Washington was part of his scheme.

"We cannot accept such insanity!" raved Durochel. "Morocco and the Niger territories belong to France! Algiers is part of France; Tunis wishes to be ours!"

Shane, with maddening coolness, simply repeated himself.

"Algiers is a part of France because France says so; Algiers shall have a chance to decide for herself. As to the other colonies, France and the United States move out and the International Court moves in, taking over, pending an equitable plebiscite. Peace and freedom with justice—this is our sole program. We expect France to support it, and the International Court of Justice, at the Vienna Conference."

Never—swore Durochel violently. Never, while he ruled France—and he did and would rule her! M. Shane had no authority; his Coalition of the Four Freedoms was only a vague group of theorists.

"But they have influence," said Shane mildly. "Certain of our governments have subscribed to their beliefs and acts. Remember, we want nothing for ourselves—"

It is the Frenchman's way to become more voluble and vehement as his opponent grows more quiet. Durochel waxed almost violent. Never would he, Leon Durochel, accept dictation from an egomaniacal press reporter; never would France so debase herself as to allow the International Court to rule the world, never!

Shane nodded, glanced at his watch, and turned to me.

"I think you can get hold of Washington on the phone now, Hammond. They've been expecting a call for the past two minutes."

I could and did get Washington. Durochel listened in absolute stupefaction as Norman Shane put through his calls, calmly and without heat. The new fleet of grain-ships that had already left the St. Lawrence for France, was ordered diverted to Poland. The fiscal discussions now taking place between the French committee and the Treasury Department, were to be suspended. And at Vienna, the French delegate to the peace conference was to be refused admission on the coming Monday.

Also on Monday morning, a press statement was to be released, explaining that all this was because Leon Durochel refused to coöperate with the Coalition of the Four Freedoms; or as the press had shortened the name, the Freedoms Coalition.

UNDER these successive shocks Durochel regained his composure; but, where another man could have turned white with anger, this man's features became deeply suffused.

"Coöperation!" he spat out bitterly, when Shane laid down the phone. "That means acceptance of your dictation! You will not even listen to my proposals!"

"Precisely," replied Shane. The one word held volumes. "The world that won the war for freedom has determined there shall not be another war. She dictates; she does not listen. I represent those world forces."

Durochel stood up with a gesture of finality.

"Adieu, monsieur," he exploded. "There are other Americans who will listen to reason."

"Your backing does not interest me," said Shane, smiling. "And there are other Frenchmen, M. Durochel, not activated by selfish ambition."

Durochel bowed, gathered up his papers and walked out. But those last words of his carried an ominous implication. Yes, if Norman Shane were dead, there might be other Americans who could be more readily handled. I caught Shane by the arm.



"We cannot accept such insanity!" raved Durochel.
"Algiers is part of France!"

"Norman! Remember the assassins—Madame Ley's warning!" I exclaimed hurriedly. "She promised to phone the details this evening, and she hasn't done so—"

"Give her time, Ham," he said in his tolerant, apparently easy-going way. "The evening is still young, for Paris; hasn't started yet. When she calls, I most particularly want to speak with her."

"So do I," said I. "They've tried it once; now they'll try it again, according to her. We can't neglect such warnings, Norman!"

"Don't worry; we sha'n't," he rejoined. "Well, at least we've finished with Durochel—the damned egotistical blackguard! Now it's open war with him. I wish you'd make notes of everything he said, while it's fresh in memory, and I'll check on it. I am now going to soothe my nerves with a hot bath."

He disappeared in the bathroom, and I fell to work.

I WAS still at it when the phone rang, and I caught it up eagerly. It was Madame Ley. Her voice seemed breathless and hurried, and she did not even ask for Shane, but broke at once into her message.

"Good evening, Mr. Hammond! I call as promised. The attempt is to be made tomorrow, when Mr. Shane goes to lay the wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe—"

"Wait a minute, please!" I interrupted. "Norman wants to speak with you."

I called him. A towel around his middle, he hastened out and took the phone. For a moment or two he listened to what she had to say, then:

"Thank you, Vera," he said. "I understand. No, I sha'n't blame you for anything. Do as you must. If I can help you in any way, if you are under some constraint—what, hurried? Then thanks again, and good-by."

He put down the phone and sat there staring at nothing.

"Strange!" he murmured at last. "Strange! She said the man Lafarge must be taken alive at all costs—that he alone could reveal the instigator—"

He put that big hairy paw of his across his face and sat immobile, as though trying to find with inward vision some objective. At length he looked up at me, and I was startled by the exultant blaze in his eyes.

"I see, I see!" he exclaimed. "But, Ham, what's this about some ceremony? A wreath? Has anyone mentioned it to you?"

"No," I replied. "Not until she did. The Unknown Soldier, yes—a graceful gesture. All visiting celebrities here do it."

"Well, let it pass. We're warned; that's the great thing. And no mat-

ter what happens now, one thing is certain! This woman is a friend."

The next day was Sunday. Shane wanted to go to church, but I was too alarmed over the assassination warning to permit it; he laughed at me,



will be of a significance to catch the imagination. Eh?"

Shane beamed. "Excellent! I should have thought of it myself!" he said heartily. "Will you excuse me for a moment, while I telephone to break another engagement? Hammond, you might ring for the garçon and have some coffee sent up."

I was mystified, and thunderstruck; there had been no prior engagement. Shane went to the phone in the adjoining room and I could not hear what he was saying. But in my mind leaped the question: Could Morant be back of the assassination project?

You may well laugh at the bare suggestion now. Georges de Morant is known as one of the finest men alive.

"I understand," he said. "No, I sha'n't blame you for anything. Do as you must."

His bluff honesty has become symbolic of the new France that emerged from her war-agony weak but triumphant. But, at the moment, that question tormented me horribly. However, I knew that I must trust Shane. . . .

The coffee arrived. When we were alone, Morant regarded us gravely.

"Alors! I must ask whether you have heard the rumors of calumny?"

Shane frowned. "About what?"

"That Madame Ley accompanied you from London."

"She did. I've heard no rumors. What's so wrong about it?"

"My friend, it is being said that you capitulated to her charms, that she won you over to the enemy, that you have interested yourself in saving that worthless son of hers from his just retribution. That wretched fellow in Rome, Georg Voss."

"You know he is really Georg Ley, her son?" demanded Norman Shane.

"Everybody knows it. The thing is no secret. I understand that Vienna is in an uproar about it. Distrust and anger are everywhere. Charges that the Freedoms Coalition has abandoned its attitude of aloof disinterest are being made; your own integrity is assailed. We must scotch this lie immediately, my friend."

Shane gave me a startled glance.

"I told you it was a trick!" he shot at me. "Well, Morant, it's not a lie."

but remained indoors. Nor did he discuss Madame Ley's information with me. He would, he said, make any necessary arrangements.

We had plenty to occupy us until our afternoon engagement at three, with Morant. To our disappointment, he came alone. He wanted, he said, to see Shane by himself, but De Gaulle was coming in an hour or so for a chat; so that was all right.

"And," he added, as he plumped into a chair and lighted a cigarette, "if you agree, the three of us will leave together at five and go to the Arc de Triomphe when they light the flame at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, eh? I have a car coming for us, with a huge wreath to lay on the tomb. It

"I did gain a reprieve for the boy," he said bluntly, distress in his rugged, bony features. "And there's nothing to be done about it now, I fear."

He briefly sketched how it had come about. Morant's face cleared.

"You are right; do nothing about it," he agreed. "They're making use of it to injure your authority and influence, however."

"As she knew they would—or as she planned," I broke in. "This is what she meant, Norman! You remember her words?"

He nodded. "Of course. She's being forced to work for the enemy; I've suspected as much, but let it pass. Morant, I must tell you the situation with Durochel!" He recounted our interview with the Premier, and the furious scene with him, going on to describe his own repressive measures against the French government.

It is typical of Morant's high qualities that his first reaction was to think only of his country. Horror broke over his face.

"The grain fleet—the finances—*mon Dieu!* But this is a mortal blow at France!"

"Not so," said Norman Shane. "Only at Durochel, at colonial ambitions, at monopolies and selfish acquisition. Get all your men at work; open the fight on Durochel, make no compromise! The ball is yours to pick up and carry; France is yours for the taking. Make all France comprehend the truth and resolve to do her part in this new world of ours!"

MORANT sat as though frozen; but his eyes kindled with joy and understanding.

"I see, yes—I see!" he murmured. "And possibly further incidents will happen to assist you," went on Shane. "Never mind what they are. If what I anticipate does happen, Durochel will indeed be destroyed!"

"But you—there is danger for you!" Morant said gravely. "This Madame Ley is a foe, a campaign against you is afoot. You should issue a statement in the matter."

Norman Shane shook his head. "No; they may be counting on that. No, my friend; serenity, like thought, is a tremendous force. Indeed, thoughts may be more potent than bullets, in the new order of things! Vera Ley has chosen this very weapon in the attempt to discredit me—or those behind her have done so. Now it's time for De Gaulle, so have a care what you say before him."

Prompt to the minute arrived that tall, stooped hero of the Fighting French, who had so simply refused any political profit from his patriotism. Shane had never met him. Almost at once they plunged into a discussion, growing more animated every moment, of the colonial question and

the self-determination of peoples under the International Court of Justice—that burning issue so tremendous in its implications and its issue. To a great extent they were in complete accord; before we realized how time fled, Morant was on his feet, glancing at his watch.

"We must leave in five minutes," he exclaimed. "The car will be waiting."

"Good." Shane came to his feet. "I'll be ready in a jiffy. Hammond, will you lend me a hand?"

In the next room, I clutched at him. "For God's sake, Norman, don't risk this—"

"No risk, but a tremendous gain, if they try to pull it off!" he said, laughing a little. "I have a dozen U. S. Army motorcyclists posted. Our pot-hunters will run into a trap and we'll nab them, including the Lafarge chap. If he will talk, as Vera Ley says he will—Lord! Think what it'll mean! Why, it'll smash things wide open! We'll win like a shot!"

"But you can't afford to risk—"

"Ham, I tell you there's no risk!" he exclaimed, almost angrily. "I didn't know this was to happen; but it's the exact thing we needed! It's the exact thing I foresaw as a possibility—a crude attempt at assassination which will put the whole game in our hands."

He was excited, eager, animated.

"Has Morant anything to do with it?"

"Heavens, no! He's to be one of the victims. Rest easy; I've taken every precaution."

Shane was by habit so opposed to any sort of police protection, that merely hearing he had called in our own armed forces reassured me completely—fool that I was. For, as the world now knows, his precautions were well taken, but the attempt was by no means crude.

The four of us, Shane and Morant, De Gaulle and I, were bowed out by hotel functionaries to the big limousine waiting at the entrance. Some gendarmes held back the gathering throng of sight-seers; I noted a number of U. S. uniforms and knew our men were on hand.

We got into the car, and nothing happened. But at this precise instant, by infernally clever timing or signals, a motorcycle and sidecar came sweeping down the wide avenue.

From their places of concealment, a dozen U. S. Army motorcycles burst forth with a wild roar of sound. They

were just a fraction of an instant too slow. True, they struck that cycle and sidecar in a mad tangle of men and machines; but as they did so, a tommy gun sent a burst of bullets into our limousine. The assassins were rattled, however; their aim was spoiled. And before they could repeat, they were spilled all over the street.

Our limousine driver was killed. Morant was struck by two bullets, neither hurt being serious; De Gaulle got one through the arm; Shane and I were untouched. This made it appear that the attempt was aimed at Morant rather than at Shane, and served us well.

THE commission of the International Court sitting in Paris took instant action—no doubt forewarned by Norman Shane of what to expect. Within thirty minutes, planes from army centers were dropping paratroops by the thousand along the Champs Elysees; within an hour, Paris was under martial law. The National Assembly sitting at Versailles was dissolved by proclamation and all governmental functions were taken over by the International Court, whose tentative functions were thus converted into stern reality overnight.

In regard to the captured assassins, the Court moved with the same swift speed, giving no chance for riots. Indeed, Paris was stunned. Both the men were fanatics; but one of them, Lafarge, willingly talked in order to save his life.

Before midnight that night, Durochel was arrested. At eight next morning, he was put on trial before a court of Allied officers, charged with instigating the crime. The two assassins had already been tried and sentenced; Lafarge was reprieved. At nine o'clock, all evidence was in and Durochel began his famous and desperate burst of oratory, designed to gain time. It was useless; he was convicted.

At noon, a temporary government headed by Georges de Morant, operating under the International Court, was in power; France was herself again. It was all very brief and savage and beautiful, firmly establishing once and for all the International Court of Justice and the principles of the Four Freedoms.

The pressure put upon France was, of course, instantly relieved. This and the rest is history. What is not in the books is that, during the stirring events of that morning, I was called to the phone and heard the low, magical voice I knew so well.

"Good morning, Mr. Hammond!" said Vera Ley. "Please give Mr. Shane my compliments—and tell him to beware of Africa! That is all I can say now. Good-by."

Beware of Africa! I thought it some mistake on her part—God forgive me!

Another dramatic story of this daring venture in prophecy "Tomorrow's Men" is scheduled for our forthcoming March issue.

BECAUSE of the extraordinary interest of this book of very real experience, and because distance and censorship as yet forbid stories from our men in Africa and the Solomons, we have borrowed space from the Real Experience department to give you a generous measure of Charles Courtney's story.

CHAPTER ONE Arrogant Fingers

I HAVE an arrogant pair of hands. Whether they are making way for a doctor, picking the lock on a door behind which a frightened girl is dying in childbirth, or ferreting at the secret bolts of the chest in which Queen Isabella kept the jewels that financed Columbus, they are always leading me into unpredictable adventures. Some of these adventures are hilarious and fantastic; others, spine-freezing, and most of them, profitable.

From my earliest memory my fingers molested every lock, watch, or motor within reach. They strewed my childhood with dismembered mechanical gadgets, but they did not pick locks until my seventh year. Then they began by pantry raiding. Our stepmother was a cook with a reputation, whose jams and jellies brought highest prices at the local church raffles and school affairs. But we rarely enjoyed them; only on Sundays, holidays, or at times when father was at home did we taste her famous peach butter and crab-apple jelly.

She had resigned herself to a house strewn with dog bones, ragged caps, all the flotsam and jetsam of seven children, but the jam closet was her holy of holies. Inside, on the shelves, tidily covered with scalloped white wrapping paper, were rows of sweets: apple jelly, grape chips, wild blackberry, plum, and blueberry jam. Between the unpainted rough board walls not a jar was out of line.

One summer afternoon when "mother" and father had driven away in the buggy and left us to tend the baby, we tried to raid the pantry. The batten door was of thin, soft pine with such wide spaces between the boards that the light showed through, and the lock was cheap, but we could not force it.

I ran into the kitchen and looked around. In a pan on the table was the skeleton of the chicken that we had eaten for dinner, picked white and clean. Collecting a drumstick, a paring-knife, and a file, I returned to the attack. After hours of gouging and scraping, I whittled at the bone until it sprang the lock; then I opened the closet, took out three jars of peach butter, and invited the rest of the children to a party in the woods. We might have escaped punishment if nature hadn't taken a hand, but father soon found out why we were groaning with stomach-aches. He went into the back yard and cut a peach-tree switch. Because I was the ringleader, I took the beating, but I was comforted by my pride.

We children were a lawless crew. Although our own mother died when I was six years old, I remember her dimly, a quiet woman with blond braids that fell to her knees. Father, who was a Frenchman from Lorraine, had brought her all the way from East Prussia to this Virginia farm. She not only cooked, sewed, knitted, and kept a smoothly running house for her husband and six children, but she was more clever with her fingers than he. When anything mechanical went wrong, it was she who mended it. She whittled and fitted new spokes for broken chairs, wove seats of clothesline, patched the gold frame on father's portrait when one of us knocked it down from its place over the mantel, and reset the lock on the sagging front door. Somehow, she found time to do fine wood carving, chiseling little figures for us out of hard blocks of holly.

UNLOCKING

After her death the neighbors did what they could to hold our family together. The storekeeper at the crossroads three miles away sent us pig's backbone when he butchered, and in return we boys helped his daughter push the long-handled paddle through apple butter stewing in the big iron kettle behind the smokehouse. Our next-door neighbor, a mile beyond us on the other side, gathered us all in his wagon and took us to church when the circuit rider held his monthly service.

Father was away most of the time, buying fish from Alaska which he shipped by boat to Seattle, by rail to New York, and by ship and rail again to Germany and Poland. Since there was no electric refrigeration in those days, he gambled with the weather. An unseasonable warm spell might melt the ice and ruin a whole shipment. One catastrophe had so crippled father that he had moved his family from New York to the red mud farm on the slope of the Blue Ridge.

In the beginning he had taken pride in his Virginia home, but after mother's death he was corrupted by the lackadaisical habits of his neighbors. The old weathered farmhouse that clung to the mountainside needed repairs. Its floors were seldom freshly clayed, and the few pieces of good furniture that mother had brought from Germany, the carved oak chest and the claw-footed dining table, were seldom waxed. After dry spells the roof leaked during rainstorms, and nobody did anything more than set a pan under the drip.

After a year father, harassed by his young gang, married my mother's sixteen-year-old sister. For the wedding he brought home the largest Alaskan salmon the village had ever seen. All the neighbors came to the feast, but enough of the salmon remained to make us dinners for a week.

The new stepmother was kind to us until her own son was born. She fed us well and sometimes played with us, but father's home-comings were the high moments of our lives. In the evenings he sat in a ladder-backed chair by the fireside and told us stories. He was a fascinating man, but remote, and we listened with awe as his voice rumbled through his beard.

When he was in an expansive mood, father let us play with two great iron keys that he kept in the bottom drawer of his desk, stuffed in with old letters, little rolls of string, pencil stubs, a pair of scissors with a broken point. The keys, he told us, belonged to the Bastille. He showed us the bows at the tops, with holes so wide that we could stick three fingers through them. These bows were set on the stems at right angles and not on the same plane, as they are on ordinary keys. One unlocked a double door, seven inches thick, in the tower of the old prison. The other belonged to a chamber called the *Third Bertaudière*, in which lived the famous "Man with the Iron Mask," a mysterious personage of such high degree that the governor never sat in his presence. Many years later I learned that the main key to the fortress hangs on a wall in Mount Vernon. Lafayette, who led the National Guards in the assault on the prison, sent it to General Washington.

Father inherited the two keys in his desk from Jules Verne. He said that his grandmother was the French

HIGHLIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

ADVENTURE by Charles Courtney

novelist's sister, so my brothers and I calculated that Verne was our great-great-uncle.

To the children on the Virginia farm, Jules Verne was a character out of a fairy tale.

"Read us *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*," we begged father. We knew it by heart and could prompt him when he skipped a paragraph. I was resolved to become a diver some day and do the things that Jules Verne had dreamed.

True enough, I have gone down into the sea and met adventures that Verne would have seized upon as plots for stories, but he would not have believed that they were actual experiences. Nevertheless, they are recorded in the prosaic financial records of many a business firm as well as the archives of the U. S. Treasury Department, the Soviet government, and the British Admiralty.

Uncle Jules and his stories were soon crowded from our minds by our own difficulties. When her first child was born, our stepmother began to want the house for herself and her own family. She complained to father that she was overworked, and we grumbled because we felt neglected. Father was trapped by conflicting loyalties: sympathy for us and love for his young wife. As a result the family was broken up. My oldest brother and sister and a younger brother were sent to our grandmother in Prussia, another brother went to Arkansas, and a sister to relatives in Cincinnati. They were all gone except me and my half brother. Perhaps father kept me because I was undersized and looked delicate.

WITH the house to herself, my stepmother fixed up the large room upstairs and rented it to the summer boarders who came to the mountains from Norfolk, Richmond, even as far away as Baltimore and Washington. They boarded with the farmers, fished in Three Forks River, and rode along dirt highways that were little more than bridle paths. The \$2.50 a week that they paid for board was a godsend to the farmers who had plenty of ham, eggs, and vegetables but rarely enough cash to buy a pair of shoes.

Our two boarders were a Miss Neville and a friend from Portsmouth, Virginia. My brother and I called them schoolteachers because they were kind to us and tried to make a dent in our ignorance. Miss Neville liked cantaloupes, so I ran a mile down the road to a farmer who grew them and brought back melons that were perfectly ripe. She gave me nickels and told me tales about her brother who was an officer in the marines.

"That's better," she would say when I laughed. "You're too sober for a little boy."

In the autumn, after Miss Neville left, I ran away from home. I was nine years old and had never seen a sidewalk. Somebody gave me a ride to Marion. It was a wonderful town standing against the mountain, with streets so steep that you were afraid the wagons and carriages coming down the hill would fall on you. I wandered down Main Street, looking at the shop windows, trying to decide what to do. Before the blacksmith's shop several horses were tied, waiting to be shod; at one side of the entrance hung an iron key a foot long, enclosed in a scroll; inside the

shop, a heavy, bald man with his sleeves rolled up was striking sparks from a red-hot piece of iron. This was where I wanted to work.

When the smith untied his leather apron and prepared to go home for dinner, I asked him if he didn't need a helper. We bargained for fifty cents a week and keep. Since the "keep" was never enough to satisfy a growing boy, I was often so hungry that I stole carrots from the farm wagons in front of the grocery store.

From breakfast until supper I ran errands, delivered heavy packages of hinges or doorstops, or mended andirons; for in those days the blacksmith made and repaired everything from keys to iron cart tires. Sometimes I helped about the forge, and that I liked. When the smith saw that I was quick with my hands and good at making keys, he often turned them over to me. He disliked locks, but their intricacies fascinated me. Before long I had made for myself a set of picks and skeleton keys.

Soon I made friends with the boys in the neighborhood. One evening when the whole town was celebrating the victory of the local high-school football team, four of us walked down Main Street, looking for mischief.

"Bet you I can open every door on this street," I boasted. While my confederates stood watch, I picked the locks of five stores.

"Hsst!" they warned. "Here comes the cop." We hid while the one village policeman made his rounds and perfunctorily started to try the doors. The first one opened; so did the others. He trumpeted up the street, shouting for the owners. The merchants came running. We stuffed our fists into our mouths to keep from giggling while they made hasty inventories, found nothing missing, and persuaded themselves that in the excitement over the game they had forgotten to lock their doors. In my own circle, I was established as a first-class magician.

Sometimes, when the blacksmith went to a lodge picnic or a ball game and left me in charge, I rummaged through the heap of locks at the end of the shed, picked out the most complicated ones, and practiced making keys to fit. The smith was a collector, not because locks touched his imagination, but because he never threw anything away. He dreaded trying to repair a lock and always sold a new one when he could.

"That old thing isn't any good," he would tell a customer. "It wouldn't keep out a peewee. You need a real good new one." The new lock was put on the door and the old one went into the shed. His junk pile included the handiwork of several fine old colonial smiths.

As I filed away, enjoying the precision of the work, my imagination roamed. What had these old locks protected? Perhaps they had fastened doors behind which the mountain men left their brides when they went to fight Indians or hunt bear and wild turkey. Or they may have locked chests brought from the East in covered wagons that followed Daniel Boone—chests that held the family Bible, a piece of lace, an English china teacup, small relics of the old civilized life to which the women clung. I built romances about them, adventures in which I was the hero. Always, at the crisis, I arrived, opened the door, and saved the children from burning alive or the old grandmother from the villain who was torturing her to learn under which hearthstone the money was buried. . . .

When spring came, and the summer boarders, Miss Neville and her friend returned to the farm. I left the

HIGHLIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

blacksmith shop and came home, bringing my savings in a china pig. But my stepmother was not overjoyed to see me. Soon there were tears and complaints to father that I was unmanageable, but I stayed doggedly because I wanted to be near Miss Neville. That summer she gave me books to read and kept telling me that I must study and get an education. When she returned to Portsmouth, she gave me her address.

"If you want to go to school," she promised, "come to Portsmouth and I will help you."

AFTER these friends left, I was lonely and miserable. Breaking the china pig and finding that I had enough money for a ticket to Portsmouth, I begged another ride to town, climbed off at the station, and bought a ticket. The train filled me with a mixture of elation and terror, and so did the city, the streetcars, the confusion and noise. After walking for hours, I reached Miss Neville's street and came to a white-pillared house set back in a lawn shaded by trees.

Miss Neville made me welcome, bought me some decent clothes, and sent me to school. The Negro servants looked after me and called me "Master Charles." I liked that.

After dinner I was sometimes permitted to stay downstairs and listen to the marine officers, friends of Miss Neville's brother, Major Wendell C. Neville, afterward commandant of the Marine Corps. He was an accomplished storyteller and made life in the marines seem the most glorious adventure a man could have. I sat very quietly in a corner and worshiped him. Then and there I determined that when I grew up, I too would be a soldier of the sea.

"But you can't enlist until you are eighteen," Miss Neville told me. "First you must go to school and get an education."

The public school was torture. I could not understand discipline, and to be thrust into a class with younger children who were all further advanced in book learning than I was a burning humiliation. I was like a frightened woods animal turned loose in a city square. . . .

When I had almost conquered my aversion to school, a letter from father upset my world. The brothers and sister in Germany wrote glowing pictures of grandmother's riches, her big house, the lake to boat on, the comforts. Because he was away so much of the time, father decided to take the rest of us to Germany. When Miss Neville read me the letter, I burst into tears, but she promised me that when I was eighteen I could return and join the marines.

The trip to Germany was a holiday. The grown-ups were sick, but I wore my Sunday clothes all the time and ran about the decks boasting that when I grew up I was going to be a captain of the marines and sail a bigger ship than this.

Grandmother lived in a beautiful house, but she was a rigid old lady, incredibly neat and tidy, with a soul that was horrified by a track on the kitchen floor. She fed and scolded the young barbarian, but she did not know how to love him or make him welcome.

For four years I went to a school in which the work was not difficult and I did not feel so out-classed as I had in Portsmouth. The chief event of those years was father's trip to Paris. Jules Verne had died, and one of his friends, a Rothschild, summoned the heirs to learn the true story of the author's origin and receive their inheritance. Because there were so many heirs the legacy was small, but father brought home a little Bible as big as a matchbox. We read it with a magnifying glass. This inspired my brother, who wanted to be an artist and practiced delicate, fine line drawing. He engraved part of the Lord's Prayer on a pin.

At fourteen I was apprenticed to a locksmith. In a musty little shop with windows set in stone walls two feet thick, this deaf old man made iron locks, hammered and chased by hand. They were not the modern locks that we know, but the ancient warded kind that might have been designed by Martin Luther's father. Each was different. They were decorated with chased or engraved designs, sometimes fauns and mythical animals cut out of thin strips of iron and standing free. He spent at least a month on castle locks. To open them he made letter keys. If the customer's name began with "B," he made the bit of the key in the shape of a "B," and designed an elaborate set of wards to match. . . .

After a year with the smith, I went to Berlin to attend a technical institute for students who were engaged in trades. Half of the day I worked as a machinist; the other half, I studied mechanical engineering. By that time I was a German boy; America seemed very far away.

Going to school one day, I passed a group of American marines. They were sight-seeing, laughing and swinging along the walk as if they owned the world. I followed them and presently when one stopped to look into a shop window, I spoke to him, haltingly, in rusty English. He told me that his detachment was from a battleship anchored at Kiel.

"Do you know Captain Neville?" I asked. Yes, he knew the captain well and promised that if I would send a letter to him at Kiel, he would deliver it.

I raced to the high school and wrote the letter. Months passed. Every day I waited for the answer but it never came. However, my mind was made up to return to America somehow and join the marines.

It was not so easy. Father had no patience with my leaving school, so he would not give me the money. When grandmother too failed me, I went to the American embassy.

"Have you a birth certificate?" they asked. Again I wrote to my grandmother but she gave me no information. Without the birth record the embassy could do nothing.

Finally I went to my oldest brother. He argued with me for hours, trying to persuade me to go back to school, but when he saw how unhappy I was, he finally gave me the money.

"You're such a kid," he said when he bade me good-by at the gangplank. "I hope the marines will make a man of you."

On a rainy spring morning of 1909, I sailed for America.

CHAPTER TWO

Fourteen-eighty and a Horse Blanket

I DID not have enough money left to go to Portsmouth, so I found a job in a machine shop on Maiden Lane and went to night school to improve my poor English. In the late summer I took my savings and went South. Portsmouth had sprawled all over the scrub-oak flats to which I had run away, but the house was unchanged behind its magnolia trees. The same plump, jolly colored maid answered the door, only she was older now, fatter. Miss Neville was very kind and invited me to visit her, but when I learned that the major was stationed in New York, I returned. One day in August I was admitted to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, a United States Marine.

The first six months are the hardest.

"Hi, you leathernecks, step lively! You'd think your father was a snail. 'Tention!" A fist in the stomach reminds you to pull it in. Out of the side of your eye you watch the officer inspecting arms, grabbing a gun, sighting down the barrel, hurling it back. Will you be nimble enough to catch it at the position of "port arms"? Wash, wash, wash, wet down the floor, spread out your khakis, scrub with soap and a brush, throw on a bucket of water or turn on the hose, and, if the electric iron is busy,

crease your trousers and sleep on them. Always wet clothes hanging up at night. Mend, patch, sew on buttons until your thumbs are sore. Polish buttons, polish rifles.

Guard duty, tramping for four hours with your heavy rifle, the old "Krag's folly," rubbing a blister on your shoulder. Four hours on and eight hours off. Stagger into the guardhouse and fall on the bunk. Loosen your ammunition belt and unbutton your coat, but you mustn't unlace your shoes. Queer how hard it is to sleep in your shoes.

Off duty, you climb into your bunk, to sleep at last, but at four o'clock the fire-drill siren screams. You grunt, open one eye, and roll under the bunk. But the sergeant's on to you. He stabs you with a stream of water from the hose. You crawl out, shivering, wiping the icy water from your eyes, and listen to his stream of oaths. But you keep your mouth shut; you can't talk back to a sergeant.

BY Thanksgiving I was so discouraged that I had made up my mind to go to Portsmouth A.W.O.L.; not, however, until after dinner, which was to be turkey and all the trimmings. When I went to the gate to check out for liberty, the officer of the day snapped, "No liberty. All marines stand by to embark for Nicaragua." That was different; at last I was headed for adventure.

On board the U.S.S. *Dixie* was Major Neville. He was astonished to see me and promised to watch how I was getting on. Down the coast we sailed toward the Spanish Main, scrubbing, scrubbing, washing all the way. Before we were a couple of days at sea, I had made skeleton keys to the galley and pantry. Midnight raids on the supplies made me popular with the other leathernecks and I was soon the unofficial locksmith of the expedition. Whenever the lock to a ditty box was jammed or a key was missing, it was "Charley, will you pick this for me?" or "Charley, can you make another key?"

At two o'clock one morning our company was awakened to make a landing. The ship was darkened. With hushed shuffling we rolled and packed our blankets and lined up for quinine, then pushed off in the landing cutters and rowed to the beaches. Captain Gulick ordered us to strike out up the beach away from the village of Corinto. Gray dawn came, and sunup. By noon we were tramping through the scorching heat, shuffling along in sand so fine that we had to stop every once in a while to take off our leggings and high shoes and shake it out. Still no sign of Zelaya and his army; they had disappeared without a trace.

As for Zelaya himself, he slipped aboard a small Mexican gunboat in the harbor and stayed there under our very noses. We could have blown him out of the water with a good stiff sneeze, but we couldn't buck international law, so we sat there and grumbled with our glasses trained on the gunboat while we waited for orders from Washington. One morning we found the harbor empty; the gunboat had slipped away in the night.

A few days later we received our orders to sail. We heaved anchor, the engines started, the propeller began to turn, but instead of pushing us, it began to kick up tin cans, a bombardment of them that flew as high as twenty feet above the stern deck. We tried to bat them off with our hands, and junior officers ducked and swore at the stains of seaweed on their uniforms. The captain signaled "Stop" and sent a man overboard to investigate. The ship was resting on a mountain of empty cans from which the cook had fed us beans and billy.

Afraid the propeller would break, the captain ordered the ship's diver to go down and shovel away the cans, and asked for two volunteers to keep the sharks away. The monsters followed the ships and lived like gourmands on the refuse thrown overboard. I jumped forward, eager to go down into the kingdom of Uncle Jules. Neither of us volunteers had been in diving suits before and we were awkward, but I had examined them

"Unlocking Adventure," by Charles Courtney

so often that I had imagined every experience. As our feet were helped onto the Jacob's ladder, the sergeant shouted to a group of marines hanging over the rails with boat hooks spiked with meat:

"As soon as they get over, drag the hooks to the bow. Do your stuff, you bunch of leathernecks!"

Down we went, through the green water that turned gray until it caught the reflection of the white sand on the harbor floor. There was no great pressure because we were no lower than thirty-five feet, but I almost forgot the sharks in my curiosity. About the great mound of cans swam bright gold and scarlet fish, trailing spirals of bubbles through the blue gloom, making the garbage heap look like a tower of jewels.

Soon the propeller was freed and we were churning toward Panama, eager for the lights of town, with our pay burning in our pockets. . . .

In Colon our floating regiment was split up. At the marine barracks in Portsmouth, N. H., I was assigned to the U.S.S. "*Southery*," the naval prison ship on which we guarded the prisoners. If they got away, we finished their time. The duty was strict: talking back to a noncom, five days on bread and water; a second offense, chains or double chains in a dark cell.

I kept my record clean until one fine lazy day when we went rowing on the river, eleven marines and a corporal sent out to practice. After a stop at a Portsmouth brewery where some of us sampled the beer, we started back. Passing some lobster traps and feeling gay, we decided to pull out one and look at it, strictly in the interests of science, for most of us had never seen a trap. The fisherman who owned it shouted to us to drop it, and we retorted with abusive names. None of us noticed that an officer of our ship was sitting on the beach with his Portsmouth flame, listening to the brawl. When we arrived at the landing dock, we were met by a sergeant and a private with fixed bayonets.

"Line up before the mast," they ordered. We were in for it; we had to go before the captain for judgment. He told us that our behavior was a disgrace to the navy and gave us three days on bread and water.

By the second day any one of us could have eaten a horse blanket. That night, when the sergeant took us out for relief, I fixed the cell door so that it could be opened from the inside. About an hour after taps when all was quiet, I crept to the galley and picked the lock. On the stove were two large pans of pork sausage ready for breakfast. Snatching one of them, I locked the door and hurried down to the brig. After our feast came the problem of the empty pan, which was too large to go through the porthole. We heard noises on deck and I dared not return to the galley, so I crept up the stairs, left the pan on the top step, locked myself in, and went to sleep. In the morning, the cook came into the galley, half-asleep as usual. How did the pan walk out of the galley with the door locked? There was a great to-do and a search, but our locks were tried and we were pronounced innocent.

"All I can think of, sir," ventured the cook, "is that the rats dragged that pan out of the galley." But he could never explain how the rats could have pushed it through a locked door.

WE marines were shunted from marine barracks to rifle range, to army maneuvers, to navy yard, but we always considered ourselves the top of the heap. At Wakefield Rifle Range, I won my silver cross and the \$3 extra pay a month for being a sharpshooter, but the honor, or rather my too-nimble fingers, nearly brought me to court-martial. We sharpshooters were detailed to guard the paymaster at the navy yard twice a month be-

fore pay-day, with orders to shoot on the split second, if need be. One torrid summer night, after the paymaster had made up his money, I was stationed in the small room outside the cage which housed the safe. Toward morning, when my ears and eyes were weary from the strain of keeping on the alert, I felt that I should perish if I did not have a drink of water.

There was no way to communicate with the corporal of the guard who had locked me in, so I picked the lock, took on board a glass of water, and hastened back to the cage. To my horror, I saw that there was no way to lock the door from the inside. The time for relief was near. Wits sharpened by danger, I cut a sliver from the leather strap that held my gun holster, slipped it between the door and the jamb and shut the door.

Along came the old corporal of the guard and stuck in his key. It failed to work. He turned it and, of course, locked the door which then unlocked easily. When he pushed the door open, he never noticed the tiny scrap of leather that fell to the floor. On our way to the guard-house, he looked at me with a worried frown.

"Charley," he said, "that door was open all the time. We'd have caught hell if the officer of the day had come along and tried it."

"Hell" was an understatement. As I saw the look of distress in his eyes and felt the icicles creeping down my own back, I resolved that hereafter I would make my fingers behave. No more passkeys to the galley to stuff myself after taps, no more picking the lucky bag to get back my ditty box that "Jimmy Legs" had found on deck, not even to save myself the punishment of extra guard duty when I had a date with a girl.

I KEPT my word to myself. The next time I tampered with a lock, I did it for the glory of the marines. I was at Portsmouth navy yard again, on duty at the gangway of the U.S.S. *Franklin*, when I saw a civilian coming on board with a bag of tools, drills, and whatnot. He told me that the ship's safe was jammed and he was called to open it.

Several hours later, the locksmith passed me again.

"What luck?" I asked.

"The tumblers are loose," he told me. "I'll have to come back in the morning with a couple of helpers." He had scarcely reached the dock when I went to the top sergeant and told him that I would like to try and open the safe.

"You're nuts," he said. "That safe's been locked for ten days and they had to send for a man from the factory in Covington." But he took me to Commander Stone, old E. P., who was called "Hardboiled Stone" in the navy. The commander looked at me glumly and said, "Let him try it."

Although I had no tools, I opened the safe in three hours. Then I cleaned the lock, oiled it, and put it together again. Commander Stone relaxed to the extent of a smile.

"Good work, my boy," he said.

Next day, when the locksmith returned, he looked for me and asked how much time I had to do. Another year, I told him.

"If you want a job," he said, "you can have one with me in Covington."

I filed the man's offer away in my mind, for by this time I knew that I did not intend to stay in the marines when my time was up. It was a fine life but I wanted to be a locksmith, an expert, able to crack the finest safe ever made, and I wanted to work on my own.

In the meanwhile I was learning a respect for discipline and for a fine body kept in fighting trim. I was always trying to excel. On battle practice, as gun-pointer of the

squad, I fired the secondary battery and won a white "E" for my sleeve for making six hits out of six shots, also \$6 a month in extra pay. When I went on leave, I made a brave showing with the red gun on my sleeve and the silver cross on my breast. . . .

In my fourth year I went up for examination and was made a corporal. On August 24, 1913, I was honorably discharged, finished with soldiering and ready to set out upon my own business. I have never outlived the pride of being a marine. The ideals of the service had become so ingrained that they have been the guiding principles of my life, the testing rod by which I measure my conduct, remembering that I must bring honor to the service. Yes, the marines had given me a set of ethics and a standard. They had made a man of me.

CHAPTER THREE

Lead on My Soles

OUT of the marines at twenty-two, with three months' pay in my pocket and not a responsibility in the world, I returned to Portsmouth, Virginia, and lived with the Isaacs whom I had known when I was a boy. Mrs. Isaacs regarded me as a son and stuffed me with spoon bread and fried chicken.

My first intention was to get work with a locksmith, learn the business thoroughly, then start out as a journeyman smith or in a small shop of my own. It was easy enough to find the work, but I soon discovered that this wasn't the way for me to get on. The pay was only \$2 a day, but I could have managed with it if I had been learning anything. Smiths, I soon found, were no longer craftsmen as they had been in the old days. Occasionally they got an order for a hand-made lock, but they usually sent it to a blacksmith's shop. They rarely handled fine modern locks, and few of them knew a Bramah from a Yale. Most of the work was such piddling jobs as cutting keys or spending a dollar's worth of time mending a sixty-cent lock.

After trying several of these jobs, I realized that they were all alike. Mr. Isaacs, seeing that I was discouraged, took me out into the back yard under the apple tree where Ma kept a crock of water for the lame old Spitz, and asked me what was the trouble.

"You're wasting your time, son," he advised me after I had confided in him. "You aren't going to learn anything in these little shops. You've got ideas. What you want is to go into business on your own. Why don't you get a job that's quick money and save enough to start in on your own?"

This was good sense, I thought, so I looked around. The Merritt and Chapman Derrick and Wrecking Company needed divers' tenders, and that work paid well. I went to the place where one salvaging ship was refueling to go out to a wreck and saw the derricks, barges, huge winches, pontoons. It was noon. The crew had finished their lunch and were sitting about the decks in the spring sunshine. One leather-faced man in faded blue jeans was loafing on a bulkhead, smoking a corncob pipe. Going over and dropping beside him, I asked what sort of outfit this was.

"What d'ya mean, buddy? What kind of company is it? Aint you ever heard of Merritt and Chapman? They're about the biggest they come, just like a huge contracting company on land. Their business is to raise ships."

Hank was the man's name, I learned. He was the chief diver of this outfit and if I got a job, he promised to keep an eye on me and give me a few pointers.

Signing on as a diver's tender, I got to the dock early the next morning just as the stubby, broad-beamed ship was getting under way. We chugged out to about three miles from shore and tied up to a wreck. In addition to the captain, a Maine Yankee who was the salvage master,

and a small boat's crew, there were about a dozen of us divers and helpers. Hank, who was busy checking over the gear, grinned at me.

"Glad to see you, kid."

Each diver had two tenders. My partner—Bob, he called himself—was a boy from Petersburg, only nineteen but fascinated by the prospect of going down into the sea. He looked with awe at our diver, Tom King, who said he would just as soon use a saw under water as ashore. . . .

"Why don't you go down?" Hank asked me one day. "You'll get ten bucks a day and you might as well go as stay on board and nurse us."

I spoke to the captain about it and he promised to try me out. The first day I went over the side in the rubber suit, my heart was in my mouth, and my mind fastened on all the instructions I had received about keeping the lines clear and remembering the air valves when I took off so I wouldn't come shooting back to the surface with my feet above my head. This wasn't going to be so easy as that shallow dip into Corinto Bay.

Before stepping off into the water, I looked for the weighted line upon which the divers went down. Then I faced the ship's bow and looked through the glass front to right and left to see on which side the light was brighter.

"The first thing you do when you land on the bottom," Hank warned, "is to notice which side of your helmet shows brighter. Even when you think it is pitch black, there's always enough difference between the lighter and darker side to give you your bearings."

Trying to remember all these things, I smiled at Bob, who was at my life line. It was sort of hard on the kid because the captain wouldn't let him go down yet.

"Luck, partner," I could see his lips move, so I waved to him, "Thanks." Hanging onto the shot rope, I slid down fast through the blue water irradiated with light and so into the black water. Tom had warned me that the pressure at that depth would fill me with depression, maybe panic, but no one could have told me about the horrible feeling of utter desolation that grabbed me by the throat. For a few minutes I was a lunatic being slowly crushed by a nameless black void. Somewhere beyond it, I knew, was God, but so far away that He couldn't hear me call. Then the pressure of the water on my ear stabbed me with pain and I had found my nerve.

"Steady," I kept saying to myself. "Steady. Yawn and it will go away." By the time I had touched the bottom and checked to see that the weight on the drop line just rested on the hull, the pain had gone.

On the bottom the light reflected from the sand made a cheerful twilight in which we could walk around without lights. The long hull stretched farther than I could see without twisting my head, and the wreckage was slippery. My job was to tend the lines for Hank who was working with an ax, Tom who was using a saw, and a couple of others who were pulling and shifting the lumber. Another diver stood with a submarine light close to their faces. They all looked like fantastic sea monsters in their bloated rubber suits.

When a pile was freed, Hank signaled for the grab. We guided it to its load, then stood away from under while it rose through the water with the crisscrossed weed-draped mass. In a few minutes, we felt a reverberation magnified by the water until it was almost loud enough to burst the eardrums. When the water became roily with weeds and mud, we knew that the crane had dropped the load in the water farther away, clear of the wreck.

AFTER an hour we were pulled up gradually and put into the decompression chamber. In this sealed room, filled with air at the pressure which we had met under water, we traded stories until we had gradually expelled the nitrogen from our tissues. We were a lean and brawny lot, trained down like athletes, without an ounce of superfluous fat.

"Unlocking Adventure," by Charles Courtney

"Better be careful, Carl," we would tease the big Swede who sometimes yielded to his appetite and added a honey bun to his breakfast of toast and coffee. "Your blood will get blistered, and you know how it is when a fat man gets the bends. Wow! It's going to hurt you, boy!" Carl would grin and lay off the sweets for a week or two.

HANK was our authority. . . . His tales of other outfits sometimes made our hair rise. The equipment was often so primitive that it was a wonder any of the crew came up alive. The only scientific improvement in diving that he did not like was the "iron doctor." He preferred the old method of decompressing the diver in the water, bringing him up on a stage a few feet at a time.

"If I was doing it," he used to tell us, "I'd bring you up from 150 feet to about 125, and there I'd leave you for a half hour at least. If you'd been deeper, I'd keep you longer on the stage. And the last 50 feet, I'd haul you up about 10 feet every ten minutes."

"But, Hank," we protested, "what in tarnation would we do sitting on a stage and sucking our air lines for all that time?"

"It isn't so bad," he insisted. "They used to play phonograph records for us, and 'Daisies Won't Tell' sounds mighty good seeping through the water. Then there are the fishes when you get up high enough. You don't rightly know a fish until you have talked to him a couple of hours. They're mighty interesting. I never could figure out how those that cruise around at forty or fifty feet can stand the pressure, unless they are blown up like a balloon."

Hank was always lecturing us on keeping fit. There were too many examples around us of the damage that the sea could inflict on divers. Old Man Aarons, the watchman on the dock, wasn't really old, not turned sixty, but he had been twisted with rheumatism and deaf since he was twenty-five. He hadn't been too careful and the sea had finished him. And Tom King. It made us all a bit sick to think what had happened to him. Suddenly, one day, I had heard a swish of the water beside me and looked around to see him being pulled up, his saw dangling from his hand.

When we came up and got out of the iron doctor, we asked about Tom. He had been put in his bunk with a dizzy head. The doctor said it was a heart attack. A week later Tom got out of bed and sat disconsolately in a camp chair on deck, watching our helpers pulling on our shoes. The doctor said he could never dive again.

Others became blind or tubercular. If we got nitrogen bubbles in our hearts, it was all over in a few minutes; if we got them in our brain or spinal cord, we were seized with diver's palsy. One way or another, we were marked for Davy Jones. Even under the best conditions, Davy had a more than sporting chance at us.

Pressure was our great enemy. For every foot that we descended it increased until at 300 feet it was about 133 pounds per square inch, on every inch of the body—more than a good-sized boiler can stand. If our air line fouls and that wall of air collapses which keeps the pressure inside our suits greater than the water pressure, it doesn't take many minutes for the sea to crush us to jelly.

Currents are another hazard. If you get caught in a cross-current, you can neither walk nor crawl and are knocked about as helpless as a matchbox on a boiling sea. . . .

Bob finally got his chance. After he had worked as a tender for a month or two, the chief diver sent him down. At first he was tried out in shallow water, cleaning up loose wreckage and keeping life lines clear, but he was so good that he was soon working along with the rest of us.

One day when it was getting late in the season and the current was running strong, Bob had been on the bottom some time and I was in my suit ready to go down. Suddenly his life line jerked, the sharp danger signal. Instantly the winch began to pull, but the tender at the pump shouted that the air line was fouled.

If his air was cut off, Bob had very few minutes of consciousness, perhaps five or six before he would pass out. I signaled my helpers, closed my hand about Bob's air line, and slipped into the water. Going down at 600 feet a minute, I figured to reach him in a minute and a half. As my foot touched the hulk, my hand traveled along his line and reached the obstruction, a piece of wreckage jammed in the mud. I couldn't tell whether Bob was unconscious or not, but I signaled and watched his body cut through the black water. Later, when I climbed up on deck, Bob had come out of the decompression chamber and was in his bunk. He was unconscious when he was pulled out of his suit, but the doctor said he was not injured. Next morning he was ready to go down again.

But toward the end of the season I was getting tired. Ten dollars a day was good money when you got it, but — I thought it was time to look for steadier work to make my capital grow faster. Saying good-bye to Bob, I tried to persuade the kid to break away before the sea got him, but he had the glamour of sunken treasure in his eyes.

CHAPTER FOUR

War of Ships

DURING the winter of 1913-1914 my savings began to melt. Work was scarce; so I said to Mrs. Isaacs, "Ma, I'm going to take \$10 and go to New York on an excursion and look around." She encouraged me, saying that I needed a change anyway. I peeled a bill from a thin wad, sat up all night on the train, and rolled out, mussed and grimy, in the morning. All day I tramped from hiring line to hiring line, but they were so long that I grew impatient and went on to the next without waiting my turn. That night I slept on a bunk in the Mills Hotel.

The waiting-room of that dun-colored shelter was full of the people that I had seen all day except that there were more broken-down old men and bums. Waiting, I listened to the buzz of conversation. Next to me, an Irishman with a voice as deep as a buoy bell was talking to a man beside him, a little man, scrubby, with a two-day beard.

"If we had a bucker-up, we could get a job tomorrow. They need riveting gangs at the Robins shipyards. You're a heater, aint you, Jim?"

Touching the big Irishman on the shoulder, I said, "I'm a bucker-up and I'm looking for a job."

"Done," he answered. "I'm Tom Delaney and this here's Jim Monahan. You look like a Frenchie to me but we ought to make out all right."

In the morning we met at five-thirty in the restaurant. Tom paid for the breakfast because it was his idea and he was head of the gang.

When we got to the shipyards, we glanced discouragingly at each other. There were already about 400 men in line. The foreman came out of his shack and looked us over, picking out a familiar face here and there. When he came to us, Tom told him that we were a riveting gang.

"Duck in," he said; so we went inside the high wire fence. We were put to work on an old boat from Liverpool, a general cargo vessel that was tough and weather-beaten, with leaky bulkheads and spreading seams. The air was heavy with the odor of pine tar and shellac. That

day we worked overtime. As it grew dark, the flood lights camouflaged the docks with distorted purple shadows, pricked with the yellow flares of heaters' pots.

Right hand, left hand, soon I was using power tools with either one and working them in tight corners with the agility of a monkey. We rolled up the overtime when the ships came in, but when they were refitted and slid out of the docks, we were laid off.

BY autumn the yard was humming with the grim excitement of war, and we were working full time and overtime, taking care of the British ships that limped in for repairs. All day long the docks were being flooded to let out a ship or drained to repair one. For three years I worked under constantly increasing pressure, climbing around the hulls, doing zigzag patterns, setting diamond joints, and tightening angles. On Saturdays, when the pay envelopes came around, I took out of mine as high as \$75, more money than I had ever made. It went to my head. In no time I became a show-off, determined to work longer hours and put in more rivets than the next fellow. My savings account was growing fat, but by autumn of 1916, in spite of my belief in my inexhaustible vitality, I was getting tired.

When the drizzly season came and we could not work, I had a special reason for blessing the rain. On October 15, I met a dark-eyed Brooklyn girl, Dorothy Bowman. The engagement ring on her finger should have discouraged me, but I managed to see her every day. The rain was my ally. On the thirtieth, it came down in torrents and I invited Dorothy to lunch, but before we lunched, we had a damp and splattered wedding at City Hall.

For a week we honeymooned; then I went to work at the Morse shipyards. I was a married man with responsibilities.

The yards were busier than ever and full of guards and watchmen. I was sent to river gun foundations on the decks of the liner *St. Louis*, the first American ship to be armed for war. Over us all hung a tense air of expectancy. Every hour we could feel war coming nearer, and we worked at fever pitch, holding back time.

When the declaration of war did come, Dorothy and I thought that my place was in the marines, but at the recruiting office I was told that the government had plenty of soldiers but not enough ships. So back I went to the yards to patch up the damaged hulls that were going out again to play tag with submarines.

Every day the first person to whom we said good morning was Mr. E. P. Morse, the president. He was always there before six-forty-five, and in the afternoon he was the last to go. During the day he was everywhere, pushing the work ahead, and they said that he could do each man's job on the place. Iron-gray and stern, he seldom smiled, but he managed to know all about his men.

One afternoon, when everyone had gone, Mr. Morse called me into his office and we sat there looking out at the bulky shadows of the hulls rearing up into the floodlights. It wasn't long before he knew that I was an ex-marine and had been a diver and a locksmith.

Not many days later, he sent for me. The *Kaiser Wilhelm* had just come in with a new American name, *Mada-waska*, painted on her bow. When the German crew had interned her, they had locked every stateroom door and thrown the keys overboard. Mr. Morse asked me to make a master key for the cabins and pick the other locks. After that, I was made a foreman and between supervising jobs unlocked the *Kronprinzessin Cecilie* and the *Vaterland*, rechristened *Leviathan*. I liked this. It was my own work and I was getting somewhere.

One morning when I was on the *Kronprinzessin Cecilie*, working at the captain's door, I sniffed smoke. There was none in the passageways; so I went into a cabin and stuck my head out of a porthole. Yes, there was a distinct smell of fire, and while I looked over the hulls toward the build-

ings that lined the shore, a great cloud of black smoke came rolling across the ship from the opposite side. At the same moment the fire sirens began to hoot and the bells to make a great clangor as the engines bounced over the cobblestones. I ran toward the grand stairway and had reached the top step when I saw the head rigger on the landing, gesturing to me.

"Hi, Courtney, the boss wants you to open a lock," he panted. "Quick!" Running back, I grabbed a few tools and a piece of wire and dashed after him. At the foot of the gangplank stood Mr. Morse, his face white and set. But he was in command of everything. As we ran up the dock, he shouted above the noise, "The shed next the riggers' room. It's full of dynamite."

The buildings behind the shed with the red flag on its roof were already going up in flames and the heat was blistering, but the firemen were drenching the shed with a full stream from the hose. It poured over the roof and I was soon as wet as a rat under a waterfall.

With slippery fingers I worked at the lock, picking it with the wire. It was a good lock, intended to keep the dynamite away from saboteurs, and the tumbler was so cleverly set that I could not guess at them. Behind me, just out of range of the water, I could feel the riggers standing, tense, boring me with their eyes, waiting to jump into the shed. In about five minutes, they told me, although I would have said it was as many hours, the lock gave and I pulled open the door. A second later, the men were piling over me to roll out the cans of dynamite. The head rigger threw a coat around my shoulders and pulled me out of the way.

"Put on something dry," he shouted, "before you get pneumonia. If it hadn't been for you, the whole business would have been blown to kingdom come."

After the fire, which was one of the worst in Brooklyn's history and which aged Mr. Morse a dozen years, we went back to work in the blackened yards. Now we were more careful than ever about sabotage. Since the beginning of the war, I had worked with the U. S. Naval Intelligence Service and was often called to unlock the doors of strange houses or trunks or bags when the officers wanted to leave no trace. One of the Intelligence men was a heater who had often worked in my gang. . . .

Then came the Armistice. In a few months the dry-docks were as dead as a graveyard and the men who had swarmed over the hulls, the arrogant, bronzed, tough-fibered men who believed that they had won the war, had worn their silk shirts ragged and were back on the hiring line. I was out of a job.

This seemed the time to go into my own business, but the money had been spent on my family that now included a daughter and a baby son. So I stood in the hiring line again, but there was no work in New York. Every week our bank balance dwindled. Finally we had to make a decision: should I take what was left and hunt in some other city, or should I risk everything and open my own shop on the chance that I could make a living at the work that I had always intended to do?

My wife voted for taking the chance.

CHAPTER FIVE

Open for Business

OPEN for business! On that first morning in 1922, I spent little time admiring the lettering on the window of the shop, for there was much to do inside. The shop was on 125th Street west of Harlem, practically in the center of New York, and the rent was reasonable. After tramping the streets, looking at every vacant shop, I had found this shack full of plumbers' supplies and had bargained with the landlord for a corner, eight feet by eight. After I paid him \$20 for the first month's rent, I had \$75 in cash to my name.

"Unlocking Adventure," by Charles Courtney

Inside, my corner was trim and neat, with freshly painted walls, a desk, a chair, a small lathe, a key machine, a polished, black, round-bellied coal stove, and every tool in its place. When I locked the door that first night, I had taken in 85 cents, and the next day the earnings dropped to 60, but I was started and determined to see it through. Gradually the customers began to come in, and I tried to do such a good job for each one that he would go out a friend.

Every spare moment I devoted to making the shop more attractive, gradually pushing back the bathtubs, ash cans, basins, pipes, and joints, enlarging my quarters at the rate of about two feet a month. At last the owner noticed what I was about, came in with a tape measure, and raised the rent. When it had climbed to \$100 a month, I moved next door into No. 530, where my shop still is today.

IN that first shop I learned the business and I learned people. Locksmiths fit into the scheme of modern life somewhere between confidential lawyers, detectives, firemen, and police. We are called on missions to open safes or doors that more often than not are involved in dramatic conflicts in people's secret lives, jobs in which much depends on our trustworthiness and discretion. We must be ready to answer emergency calls with the speed of the police, because we can never be sure whether they are real emergencies—people suffocating in storage vaults—or only inconveniences—a key locked inside when some woman has taken the dog to walk. Both are likely to have the same urgency over the telephone.

Sometimes I panted from one emergency to another. A rush call came from a drugstore three blocks away; a man's agitated voice begged me to come quickly and save his children. While I was collecting my tools, the telephone rang again; a woman was locked out of her house and must get in immediately. They were both in the same direction so I went to the drugstore first. On the corner a policeman was keeping the people moving. There were no signs of an accident, but a man stood at the back of a closed sedan, picking hysterically at the trunk with his fingers.

"Does somebody want a locksmith?" I asked the officer. He grabbed my arm and pushed me to the car.

"Here, open the back compartment." The man gripped his hands and pushed so close that I could hardly use my elbows.

"What's in here?" I asked. "What's the special rush?"

"My babies are in there," he groaned. "They're dying and I've lost the key."

"They're not dead yet," soothed the policeman. "You just stand back and let this fellow get to work."

I attacked the lock with all the speed that I could muster, holding my breath, listening for any sound.

"Keep cool," I kept telling myself. "Keep cool and you'll work faster." Every once in a while I would have to push back the father, who edged so close that I could feel his breath on my neck. In a few minutes the lock gave. I threw up the top and there lay two babies, a boy and a girl, with their arms around each other, fast asleep.

Almost as limp as the father, I picked up my tools and went on to the second call, which was only a few blocks away. At the corner a fire engine shot by, followed by the hook and ladder and all the outfit. By the time I had reached the middle of the block and had begun to look for the number, the street was black with people and the police were clearing them away. The firemen were jumping down at my number. Pushing through the lines, I told a policeman that I had been called "rush" and he waved me along, so I ran up the steps behind the firemen who had already burst the door. A determined-looking woman led us through the hall toward the kitchen. She ran

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to the oven, opened it, and pulled out a roasting pan in which lay a goose done to a golden brown.

"Thank heaven," she gasped. "I was afraid it would burn. The fire department is so nice. I knew you would help me, and I couldn't wait for a locksmith. I thought he would never come."

The firemen looked at each other and clumped out. One of them, noticing my tools, swore softly under his breath.

"So you're the locksmith, buddy. Soak her plenty. I hope she has to get a new lock for every door in the house." But she didn't. There lay her key ring on the hall table where she had left it when she stepped out to get a pound of butter.

But real or fancied emergencies, while they furnish the spice to the day's work, are not the bulk of the locksmith's business. About a quarter of it may be lawful lock-picking, but three quarters is foiling the burglar.

IN addition to the routine selling and installing of standard locks and giving advice on the proper kind of burglar protection to meet our customers' needs, we make handmade locks for special purposes. Some of them have a tensile strength of 20,000 pounds, others are puzzle locks, and still others are so concealed that the uninitiated do not recognize them as locks, or, if they do, cannot find the keyholes.

When the U. S. Treasury went off the gold standard and recalled all gold coin, I was flooded with orders for hidden locks and rustproof chests. It is amazing how many seemingly level-headed people were stampeded into hoarding, especially the middle-aged who had worked and scrimped to save a little money for their unproductive years. A century from now, I imagine, many a gardener is going to blunt his spade on a buried box of gold.

Clients occasionally brought me problems that could not be solved by locks and keys. My most ingenious device was contrived for the use of one lone customer, but my friends tell me that it has limitless possibilities. This man slept so well that a thief could take the very pillow under his head, so he was at a decided disadvantage when his wife rifled his pockets. He had exhausted his own ingenuity; not even a white mouse in his pocket frightened her. I put clasps something like zippers in the pockets of three pairs of trousers and connected them with a small storage battery wired to a bell. When the clasp was opened, the bell rang, the man was awakened and could take what action he thought best. After several months his wife found a way to disconnect the bell. Next, I tried an invisible rubber band that, when it was stretched, pulled a wire. This must have been successful, for my client never returned.

Those first days when I was making room for myself among the bathtubs, I did any job that came along and was glad when there was enough business to keep me from four or five in the morning until ten o'clock at night. Since time was my chief capital, I had to rely on my ingenuity to find short cuts. One of them was a way of making keys for the most complicated locks without taking them apart. It could be done by looking into the keyway and gauging the tumblers with my eye. This was more difficult than memorizing a key at a glance and copying it without examination, a trick with which I often mystify my friends. It pleases my small-boy desire to be a magician when I walk over to a machine and cut out a duplicate of my friend's car key which I have seen only once as he took it out of his pocket.

Soon I began to sell locks as well as repair them, because I saw that a locksmith could not feed himself and his family on repair work alone. I began with three Yale locks and waited a month to sell the first one, but it wasn't long

before I was ordering the best makes by the dozens and then by the hundreds.

As the business prospered I took on one assistant, then another. Soon there were half a dozen of them, doing jobs all over the city. Changing locks for angry people who wanted to shut out their wives, husbands, or extra-marital partners was a small but continual part of our work. Although these emotional tangles always conformed to pattern, many had a comedy twist. Sometimes the locksmith might find himself acting as peacemaker, but he was more likely to be the innocent bystander in the line of verbal fire.

The marital difficulties of a broker with an office on midtown Fifth Avenue helped me pay one year's income tax. He called one morning and wanted the lock to his apartment changed. My assistant went to his office, picked up his key, went to the apartment, and installed a new lock on the door. While he was delivering the new keys to his client, the wife called to have the lock on the apartment changed. Another assistant took this order and immediately went to the apartment. He thought it queer that the lady couldn't open the brand-new lock with her key, but the superintendent identified her as the tenant, so my man picked the lock and installed another. That evening at about five-thirty, the broker was scorching the telephone with his opinion of locksmiths. It seemed that when he reached home, his key wouldn't even go into the lock. The man who had done the job was out at work, so another one of my staff hurried to the apartment, opened the door, and put on a third lock.

That evening, when I was checking over the orders, I noticed that we were doing a lively business with the broker's family. When the wife called early in the morning, reporting indignantly that the new lock wouldn't work, I went on the errand myself, but first I telephoned the husband, asking him to meet me at the apartment. When I saw these two attractive but embattled young people, I thought it a pity that they should be spending so much time bickering. Talking to them like a stern uncle, I pointed out that I had no particular objection to putting in three new locks a day, it was fine business for me, but that from their point of view it would be much more sensible to talk things over—that is, unless they had some strange obsession about changing locks.

The woman looked sidewise at her husband's stern face and burst out laughing. He tried to scowl but the corners of his mouth twitched, and in another moment he had thrown his arms around her. They insisted that I come in for a second cup of coffee, and I left them happily exchanging duplicate keys to the newest lock.

KEYS seem to be the accepted way of expressing the stormy emotions. When we are in love, we give keys; when we hate, we use them to lock out the people we dislike or to lock up our secrets from their prying eyes. Although much later I was called the golden key king of Hollywood, because I never talked about the affairs of clients who brought me gold key blanks to cut for their current suitors, I had plenty of this heart business from the time that I opened in the plumber's shop.

In my office now is a small carved oak chest that once held under its lid the happiness of a wealthy shipping magnate. This heavy, graying, imperious man came nervously into the shop with the chest under his arm and asked to see me privately. Putting the box on my desk he gestured hurriedly toward it.

"Can you open it? Can you open it right away?"

"Is it your chest?" I asked. "We always want to identify the owner." He drew from his pocket an inscribed alligator cigarette case, letters, three car licenses, then hesitated a moment before he answered:

"No, it isn't really mine. It belongs to my wife." Restlessly moving about the desk, he told me why he must know what was inside.

Less than a year earlier he had married a girl about whom he knew little. She was young and very beautiful and he had rushed into matrimony. For several weeks she had received letters that she read hurriedly, then locked in this chest. He dared not ask her for an explanation, but if he did not find out what was in those letters, he believed that he would lose his mind.

"My God!" he cried. "Suppose she loves someone else, I sent her on a vacation to Florida so I could get this chest. She may be with him now."

Seeing the expression in his haunted eyes, watching his nerves jump as he tried to control his restless hands, I believed that he might indeed go mad then and there. It was a nice ethical problem. Ordinarily, one does not open another person's chest without permission, but in this case I believed that it would do more good than harm.

It took some time to pick the lock. The man watched me so intently that he made my fingers clumsy. When the lock gave, he pushed me aside, opened the lid, and seized two or three letters.

After one glance, his mouth relaxed and the haunted look left his eyes.

"May I put in a long-distance call?"

In a few minutes he was talking to his wife in Florida. "Darling," he called into the phone. "I'm coming on the next plane. Don't worry about anything."

He shot out of the office, leaving me the chest and the letters. Yes, I glanced at them. They were from the wife's brother, who had been sentenced to prison somewhere in the West. Evidently she had been afraid to tell her husband.

SUCH jobs as this make the locksmith feel like a magician who can unlock the future with his prongs or needles, but who cannot tell whether it will be good or bad.

The job I remember with the keenest satisfaction I did with no tools except a fork and the handle of a spoon. The usefulness of a spoon with the bowl broken off I learned from the police, who say that prisoners in the Tombs sharpen them on the cement floors to make deadly stilettos and all sorts of prying tools.

On this morning, as I was walking to the shop, I noticed smoke oozing from the top windows of a large apartment building. Running into the foyer, I asked the superintendent if there was anyone in the apartment. Yes, he said, a family with several children. While he called the fire department, I grabbed a fork and spoon from a drugstore next door, broke off the bowl of the spoon on the pavement and hurried up in the elevator. While the operator leaned on the bell I picked the lock, my fingers moist with anxiety. By the time the fire department came, we had dragged out of their beds a father, mother, and three children, all overcome by smoke. One little girl clutched a stuffed white puppy with a bell on a ribbon around its neck.

After the firemen had revived them all, I went on to work and found a call from Mr. Morse with whom I had worked when we were dragging dynamite from his burning shipyard. His office often called me to unlock the cabins of ships laid up in drydocks, for the Germans were not the only ones who walked off with keys. Passengers were always keeping them as souvenirs. When the *Normandie* came in on her maiden voyage, I had to make new keys for almost every cabin on the boat.

Another reminder of the old days was a job that I undertook for an insurance company that wanted to get at the safe of the old Dominion liner, the *S.S. Madison*, that had gone down in a storm off Cape Henry. Although I had resolved never to dive again, this time I was going down not as an ordinary diver but as a sort of undersea Jimmy Valentine.

My old company, Merritt and Chapman, was engaged in salvaging the boat, but they expected that it would be

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two or three months before she would be afloat, and the insurance company wanted to bring up the million dollars in money and securities that were in her safe. It was impossible to get the safe on deck without blowing up part of the ship, so the lock must be opened under water. By that time I had a reputation as a lock expert, and although I had never tried to open a safe under water, I thought that I could do it if it could be done.

Norfolk had changed little. The narrow streets were full of sailors, dockyard workers, boisterous, salty, casual men who made their living by the sea. The car that dragged its trailer along the shore to Cape Henry was crowded with workmen who were brothers to Hank and Tom King.

The *Madison* lay in sixty feet of water, so near the shore that we could see the one-sided pines along the dunes. She was right side up, wedged firmly in the mud with no loose wreckage around her, just an accumulation of mud and black seaweed.

Feeling strange and awkward, I planted my cumbersome booted feet on the ladder and went over the side, but not until I felt the hull under my soles did my confidence return. I looked around curiously. The boat must have gone down slowly enough to give the passengers a chance to get away because the lifeboats were gone and there were no bodies in the cabins. In the crew's quarters below deck, however, we came upon a body that lay undisturbed where it had been trapped, some fireman or engineer who had not been able to get away. On the shelf over his bunk sat a fat white rubber pig with black and yellow spots, the sort of toy a man takes to a child at home.

All the valuables were in the safes in the captain's and purser's cabins. Under a submarine lamp I examined them, tried the combinations that the company had given me, and found that the locks had been forced out of alignment. On most safes the front plate is riveted, and, when it has been under water for some time, the water gets in around the edges of the rivets and makes them show up. Then it is an easy matter to work back the bolts and open the door. But this ship had only been in the water a short time and the rivets did not show.

In the afternoon I went down again, worked an hour with my legs braced to keep my footing on the slimy floor, and got the combination open. Quickly I sucked the contents of one of the safes into a leaded canvas bag and passed it back to the diver nearest me, who gave it in turn to the next one stationed to watch the line, and so on to the man who put it on the hoist.

WHEN I climbed on board and came out of the iron doctor, the agent of the insurance company and the captain of the salvage ship had sorted out the contents. It lay stacked up in the captain's cabin, a million dollars, they told me, in money and securities. This was the first million dollars that I had ever seen and it was disappointing: stacks of bills and packages of limp folded papers with water-soaked edges. It seemed unbelievable that these dull piles represented all the ease and glamour that money could buy.

Depressed and tired, I went outside and leaned against the rail. The captain and the agent, in high good humor, placed guards over the cabin and escorted me down to dinner.

"A good stiff drink is what you need," they said, pouring out for each of us two fingers of Scotch. Revived by the sting in my throat, I buttered a stick of cornbread, but at the first bite I doubled up with excruciating pain. The doctor said it was the bends.

For days I suffered agonies; then the pain went away as quickly as it came, but it was my warning. I never intended to give the sea another chance to get me. No mat-

HIGHLIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

ter how attractive were the offers for undersea safecracking that came my way, I refused them, but I did indulge a lively interest in salvaging and often acted as consultant on difficult safe jobs. . . .

CHAPTER TWELVE

Mystery Man of the Sea

CAN you open a safe like this?" Two prosperous-looking men with foreign accents,—French or Italian, I thought,—leaned over my desk and spread out a diagram of a safe. It was a familiar make, a type on which I had often worked.

"Yes," I said, "but—"

"Oh, this is a legitimate job," spoke the taller of them. "The safe is in Europe, and it must be opened right away. Can you go at once?" I checked with the bank references that these two men gave me and was convinced that the work was on the level. Further assurance was the fact that one of the leading engineers in Germany had recommended me, a man with whom I had worked on my trip to unlock the Kaiser's safes.

Although I was in the dark about the enterprise, I guessed that it had something to do with salvaging because it is "finders, keepers" with deep-sea treasure hunting, and a salvaging expedition does not advertise its objective either to other hunters or to governments who might want to claim a part of the booty.

With my fee safely deposited in a New York bank, to be claimed on my return, and a handsome check for expenses in my pocket, I sailed for Germany in the spring of 1932. When ship's news reporters asked whose fortune I was unlocking on this trip, I could honestly say that I didn't know. They thought I was being mysterious, but it was not until we were well at sea that I was given a sealed envelope of instructions, and even when I read them I knew little more than I had before. A single line directed me to the address of an engineer in Bremen.

When we docked, the customs officials looked suspiciously at my burglar tools, but as my credentials were in order they let me through. At the home of the engineer, one of the outstanding men in his profession, I learned that the job was to be that of opening the safes on the French liner *Egypt*, which had sunk in the Bay of Biscay in 1922.

So that was the treasure hunt! I knew about the *Egypt* and the jinx that had dogged the salvagers who had tried to bring up her \$5,000,000 of gold and silver bullion. The French ship that discovered her was nearly wrecked by storms; the second, an Italian ship, was badly damaged; and the crew of the third had been so eager for the gold that they had not moved her off far enough when a charge of dynamite boiled up under the water and tore her to bits.

This expedition was at least a partial success, the engineer told me: some of the chests had been opened with hydrogen torches, and most of the gold had been recovered, but the damage to the contents was so great—as high as 80 per cent—that they had sent for me to open the other chests.

They did not expect me to go down. I had kept my word to myself and had never put on a diving suit since I had been seized with the bends after I opened the safe on the *Madison*, but they wanted me to give long-distance instructions for opening the chests that remained under water. Knowing the position of the safes and their make, I studied their blueprints and after twenty-four hours had drawn up plans.

The engineer flew to Brest with my instructions. While he was away, his son, who was himself studying engineering, told me about the new diving methods and apparatus

that the company employed. I had heard about the Neufeldt and Kuhnke armored diving suit that was supposed to do away with the dangers of pressure and the air line and make it possible to work on the bottom for five or six hours.

"Did you ever go down in one?" I asked. "How do they work?"

"The grandest thing is that you don't have to decompress," he told me, "and you don't have to be an experienced diver. Anyone can go down safely and stay as long as his oxygen holds out. It's a rigid steel suit with movable arms and legs, all capable of resisting such great pressure that the air on the inside remains at the normal atmospheric pressure. No more bends. No more iron doctor. The whole breathing apparatus is in the suit. Through a mask over the mouth and nose, you inhale a small amount of fresh oxygen from a bottle in the suit, and exhale the carbon dioxide into a little respirator that can be exchanged when the air gets too foul without coming to the surface.

"The suit has a telephone in it, but the queer thing is that you have to talk out of the side of your mouth, and everybody's voice sounds the same. So you have to give your name, 'Courtney talking,' or the man on deck won't know which one you are."

After a few days the engineer returned with the news that two of the safes had been opened without difficulty, but there had been no luck with the others. We flew back to Brest and went out to the *Artiglio II*, the salvage ship that was anchored over the wreck. It was a dirty ship with a gang of thirty or forty divers in addition to the crew—most of them Italians from Mediterranean ports and a few Greeks and southern French. They took great risks for miserable wages and the hope of a share in the booty. In the ordinary rubber diving suits they were going to dangerous depths, and every few days there were accidents and fatalities. But human life was cheap and the lure of gold was strong. The armored suits cost \$20,000 each, they told me, so there were only three of them for expert divers.

ON deck was one of the chests that had been ripped from the floor and drilled so full of holes that it looked like a sieve. This gave little trouble but there remained another, the large purser's safe at a depth of 380 feet. They decided to open this on the bottom. When I examined the armored suits I broke my resolve never to go down again. This armor had such a self-sufficient look, with its buoyancy tank packed with four steel bottles of oxygen that the diver could use to regulate the tank, giving himself as little or as much weight as he needed. Also, I wanted to see what could be done with the tongs that were set at the ends of the rigid arms and could be moved about by the hands inside.

Commandatore Quaglia and several of the divers helped me in. They lowered me to the hulk and through a hole that they had cut through two decks directly over the purser's cabin. It had been a long time since I had looked out of the helmet at the twilight of gray water about a wreck.

The suit was good if I didn't slip or lose my balance, but so clumsy that I had the horrible feeling of being caged in an iron tube. It weighed about 900 pounds and I didn't see how a man inside could be much more than the eyes of the engineer who was running the winch above. Watching two chief divers in the other suits, I observed that they could not crawl into holes to drill or rivet, saw, or cut with a hydrogen torch. All they could do was to pull, push, lift, assisting the iron grabs into position for their yank.

Looking around, I had not the sense of intimacy that one often has on a wreck, the feeling that the men who went down on her are somewhere on the next deck and that life is only suspended. This wreck had been worked over so many times that it had lost all personality. After

making an examination of the safe, I telephoned to the captain and was hauled aboard. Stepping out of the armor, I was neither nauseated nor giddy and was half-convinced that engineering had made diving safe and comfortable.

On the deck I instructed the carpenter to build an enormous blackboard, as large as the front of the chest. On it I made a diagram of the exact dimensions of the safe, marked it off in squares and indicated with accuracy where the men should drill to release the lock.

For a week I stayed on board directing the work. Although I did not go down again, I watched this crew of untamed fishermen-divers brawling, fighting, stabbing one minute, and crying like children the next. Naturally emotional, they were working under almost unbearable tension now that they actually handled the treasure. Every morning before breakfast, the captain rumbled through morning prayers, and again as each stage went down. At night there was wine for all, and the relief of escaping another day of peril made the men either quarrelsome or melancholy. Twice during that week, a diver climbed up to the pilot house and jumped into the sea that he could fight no longer.

At last we finished hauling up the gold coins, jewels, and stacks of rupee notes. With the tension removed, the reward so near, the men went wild. All the grudges and vendettas that had smoldered while they knew that they must work together flared up with such violence that the captain had hard work to keep them from slaughtering each other. All over the deck, rupee notes were spread out to dry, and it was difficult to move without walking on money. . . .

Returning to Bremen with my host, I met Frederick Krupp, president of the great Krupp ship-building plant at Kiel; Johan George Stein, with whom he had worked out the Stein-Krupp method of submarine gold mining; Sir Basil Zaharoff; and several other international financiers who were interested in undersea hunting. Sir Basil invited several of us to spend a few days in Biarritz, where we stayed in a luxurious modernized castle that belonged to one of the party.

On the first night Sir Basil gave a dinner party for me. All were in evening dress except "der Meister-Schlossler," as they called me, but although I had only a business suit, I soon realized that no one noticed what I wore. Around the table was a group of impressive, graying, sometimes paunchy financiers of many nationalities—Greek, Rumanian, French, German—and expensively gowned girls of as many races. Sir Basil was able to talk to each one of them fluently in his own language.

AS the evening wore on, we talked quietly at the abandoned table. Sir Basil had a mobile dark face, the olive skin of the Levantine, I guessed, and a way of making every subject he touched upon sound like a colossal adventure.

Above the noise of the orchestra and the shuffle of feet, he talked about treasure hunting in the Seventeenth Century, when it was one of the world's major financial businesses for governments as well as private individuals. Salvaging vessels didn't sneak off at night to a wreck and hope that they would be mistaken for fishing smacks. Gold hunters were licensed by the Crown and sailed with a great hullabaloo of bands and cheers and waving flags.

"Sir William Phips, for instance—" But the story of Sir William had to wait while a girl with a diamond butterfly in her hair shoved aside her dancing partner and flung herself on Sir Basil's knee. Disentangling her arms from his neck, he murmured a few soothing words in Italian and eased her into a chair. . . .

"Phips was a man of destiny," said Sir Basil, "a captain of adventure in the grand manner. Running away from a Maine farm to go to sea, he became master of a sloop and dug up enough treasure in the Bahamas to finance a trip

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to England, where he persuaded Charles II to back an expedition in search of the Hispaniola treasure, the gold that went down in the galleon of a Spanish admiral homeward bound with a cargo of fabulous wealth. Men had hunted for it in the waters of Santo Domingo for forty-five years, but Phips had such a persuasive tongue that Charles lent him a ship against a fourth of the treasure.

"There was a man for you," said Sir Basil. "He had both audacity and luck. Through no skill of his own—one of his sailors saw a sea feather growing above the wreck and looked down to find the rocks of a little reef scattered with green doubloons—Phips located the treasure, won a fortune, a knighthood, and the governorship of Massachusetts. Today—"

The partner of the sleeping Italian beauty lurched toward the table and pulled at her shoulder. They both went down in an awkward huddle on the floor. Casually Sir Basil called two servants who righted the couple and eased them toward the door. The girl struggled feebly and threw kisses over the butler's shoulder.

"In this age when there is more treasure than ever on the coasts of the world's principal seaways," Sir Basil went on, "and modern engineering has made salvaging much more profitable, it is a business that is looked upon as a cross between piracy and pure speculation."

Sir Basil sighed. "There should be more adventure in money-making, the kind of adventure that makes your blood tingle with danger, not the dreary habit of outsmarting the other fellow." He pulled from his billfold a type-written sheet and spread it on the table before us.

"Doesn't this quicken your pulse?"

The sheet read:

CONFIDENTIAL REPORT OF THE LOCATION OF SUBMARINE GOLD DEPOSITS

Country	Location	Name of Wreck	Amount
Alaska	Stephen Passage		Unknown quantities of gold dust
Alaska	Taku Inlet		\$5,000,000
United States	310 feet deep		
United States	Off Virginia Capes		\$4,000,000
United States	Off Cape Henlopen	Sloop "de Braak"	Several million dollars of doubloons and pieces of eight
Martinique	About 600 feet deep	Galleon "San Fernando"	\$130,000,000
Santo Domingo	Several depths	20 Spanish galleons	Several millions in gold
Cuba	Matanzas Bay	40 Spanish galleons	\$80,000,000
Venezuela	Morjonta Channel	Ship "San Pedro de Alcantara"	\$11,000,000
Puerto Rico	12 fathoms	Galleon "La Marguerita"	\$6,500,000
The Azores	Off the coast	17 Spanish galleons	Several million dollars in gold
Cape Verde Islands		Several Spanish galleons	Several million dollars in gold
Spain	Harbor of Cadiz	Several Spanish galleons	\$1,000,000
Spain	Canary Islands	Several Spanish galleons	Several million dollars
Spain	Bay of Vigo	Many galleons	\$250,000,000
Africa	Dondola Coast	Ship "Grosvenor"	\$5,000,000
England	Orkney Islands	H.M.S. "Hampshire"	\$10,000,000
Japan	Off the coast	"Sebastopol"	\$7,000,000

Enormous amounts of gold have been sunk through the centuries in the Mediterranean Sea, in the vicinity of Cape Horn, near Panama, and in the ship lanes between Australia and South Africa and England.

"This one for me," I said, pointing to the *Sebastopol*, and began to tell Sir Basil about Kato's interest in the project in Tokyo. At this moment a German baron, his tie slightly crooked, walked with careful slow motion toward us and lowered himself into a chair.

"We were deciding, Franz, where we would like to hunt for treasure if we had lived 200 years ago."

Franz leaned over the sheet but his eyes did not focus. Sticking his finger in a half-empty wine-glass, he plumped it at random on the page, leaving a spreading red stain on Alaska gold dust.

"Here I hunt. This my treasure," he boomed with exaggerated dignity. "No poachers." Clinging to the back of the chair, he stood up, but as he stepped out, one foot caught the leg of the table, and it went over in a crash. Luckily, it tipped the other way. Sir Basil pulled me aside while the dancers crowded around Franz, shouting and laughing, piling themselves upon each other in a hilarious mountain.

"You must be tired," said Sir Basil above the noise. "Shall we see each other in the morning? I'll tell Barbara good night for you." He had realized early in the evening that it was not my sort of party, but he had been at great pains to interest me, and I went to sleep wondering why the lecture on salvaging. Sir Basil did not impress me as the sort of man to do anything without a purpose.

In the morning, while his other guests were asleep, Sir Basil and I had breakfast on a terrace overlooking the Mediterranean. He told me that Prince Oskar of Hohen-zollern, who had a palace at Kiel, wanted me to open a safe which had remained closed since the death of his father, Prince Heinrich, in 1918. But before I returned to Bremen he wanted to engage me for a salvaging venture next season. As I had guessed, he had been one of the backers of the gold mining on the *Egypt*, but now that it was completed, his interest was centered on a new venture.

In confidence, he told me that a syndicate of which he was a member had discovered the wreck of H.M.S. *Hampshire*, the British cruiser that went down off the Orkneys in 1916 while it was carrying Lord Kitchener and about 1,000 men to some unknown rendezvous. It was never acknowledged by the Admiralty and was known to but few people that the *Hampshire* was carrying not only the war lord but £2,000,000 of gold to Russia to bolster up the Czar's wavering army. That gold was what they were after—\$10,000,000 in bullion of the Bank of England. The currents were strong off the Orkneys, and the weather difficult. Already a sand-sucker was at work digging at the eight feet of sand that buried part of the wreck, and the salvaging could begin in the spring as soon as the weather permitted.

Sir Basil's brown eyes grew darker and brighter as he talked, and the color flushed his cheeks. He was so persuasive that he fired me with excitement. At first, I said that I would make up my mind and let him know, but before we had finished a second cup of coffee, I had promised that I would join.

ALL the way to Bremen, then to Kiel, my mind was assailed with doubts, and, as if to shake my confidence still further, I noticed that I was being followed by secret-service men. The mission was legitimate, and it was annoying to have someone trailing me on the train, in and out of every restaurant and shop, standing under the window when I looked out of the hotel at night. Although nothing was molested, my bags were being searched and every letter scanned. It gave me a cat-and-mouse feeling that I resented.

When I reached Kiel and presented myself at the palace, I was taken to a dungeon-like basement where Prince Oskar and a group of men were waiting for me, all of

them in opera capes, tall hats, and masks. I wondered why all the drama. Disliking to work with these masked men at my back, I insisted that we have a city official present and waited until the prince telephoned for a member of the police.

The safe was concealed behind packing-cases. After they were pulled away, I found that the safe was a familiar American make and comparatively easy to open but, out of perversity, I took a long time at it, enjoying the impatience of the masked witnesses.

When I pulled back the door, I stepped away and did not see what was inside. However, Prince Oskar was so pleased that he took from his finger a diamond ring and presented it to me, the ring which I wear today. He also gave me seven old Gothic keys from the palace.

Returning to Bremen, I talked again with Sir Basil, who would listen to none of my misgivings. He promised that the salvaging equipment would be the best obtainable and the plans so carefully laid that there was practically no chance of failure. Two internationally famous divers were working out preliminary details already and would get in touch with me. The fee was staggering.

Having committed myself to join one of the greatest treasure hunts of modern times, I took a North German Lloyd liner for New York. As Sir Basil said, the thought of it did undoubtedly quicken the pulse, but my doubts were so lively that I did not tell my wife and daughter.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Kitchener's Gold

SPRING of 1933 came, bright and raw and gusty. The two deep-sea divers who were working out preliminary plans for the *Hampshire* expedition had spent several weeks in New York checking every final detail of equipment. They were outstanding in their profession: Costello, a lanky Australian who had brought up gold from many a famous wreck, and Mansfield from Norfolk, one of the best divers on the eastern coast, like his father before him. Early in the new year, they sailed to fit out the mother ship and gather a crew.

There was nothing to do but wait and try to keep my mind on the shop. Finally, one Wednesday afternoon in late March, my secretary called me from the cutting machine: "London on the phone."

It had come. Sir Basil Zaharoff's voice, as clear as if he had been speaking in Manhattan, instructed me to take the *Bremen* on Friday for Southampton, where I would receive further instructions. With scarcely time to eat or sleep, I made final arrangements at the shop, bade my wife and daughter good-by, and fell into my berth on the *Bremen*, too tired to think. On that voyage across the Atlantic, as I looked over the rail into the deep water, realizing that I was soon going down 400 feet, there were several moments when I would have turned back if there had been an opportunity.

Mansfield was on the pier in Southampton. After a hurried day in London where I took out a \$100,000 life policy, we left for Stromness where we were to join our salvaging boat lying about sixteen miles offshore. Everything had been done with the greatest secrecy, because no salvager has a claim to a wreck unless his ship is actually tied to the hulk.

A small boat took us out to the *K.S.R.*, a stout snub-nosed vessel lying at anchor in a choppy sea. Captain Brandt, a tightly knit, gray-haired German with a competent air, met us at the ladder. He saw me examining the boat, noting the sand- and mud-sucking pumps, the winches and grips.

"Yes," he said with a smile that deepened the furrows in his eroded face, "she's equipped with everything you ever heard of. Finest salvaging ship afloat." He took me below to a cabin in which Costello was sitting over a game

of solitaire. We three had barely settled ourselves over a glass of beer when we felt the boat heading out to sea. As we bounced about in the cabin, we checked over final plans for the work.

"We three, and the skipper of course, and the representatives of the syndicate, are the only ones who know what we're after," said Costello. "The skipper has told the crew that we are a German outfit fishing for submarines, but he must think they are cross-eyed if they don't recognize the British flag. Most of them may suspect that we are after bigger fish but they don't know what. In addition to us, there are several experienced deep-sea divers. The rest are a gang of about fifty ordinary divers, Greeks from the mainland and Crete and Italians from the Mediterranean."

"Won't they be a job to handle?" I asked, remembering the crew of the *Artiglio II*.

"Yes," Mansfield grinned, "but the captain and crew are German and they're tough."

That evening an engineer who was in charge of the armored suits gave us a talk on proper breathing under water, and Max Weissfelt, a stout middle-aged German who said he represented the syndicate, impressed upon us the necessity for speed and secrecy.

The sea continued to run high. Off the Orkneys we were pitched about by a gale. Cursing, the skipper put back to Stromness, but before the storm had blown over, we were out again, impatiently skirting the coast, turning out to sea when the waters were too rough.

Then the sun came out and the wind died. All night we rocked gently on a placid sea. In the morning the boat began to cruise around in circles, darting this way and that like a pointer on a scent. Costello paced the cabin, nervous as a cat.

"The *Hampshire* should be just about under us. When we found her last year, I went down and fastened a buoy to her. She's so heavily armored that we're going to have a tough job. We can't use dynamite, and we'll have to be very careful with the torch or we'll explode the ammunition and send ourselves to kingdom come."

We felt the engines stop. The next moment the captain stuck in his head.

"All right, boys. We've dropped anchor."

Mansfield leaped up and we all followed Captain Brandt along the companionway. We helped Costello pull on a couple of woolen undersuits and pushed him into his diving armor. When his feet were on the stage, we bowed our heads while the captain muttered a prayer. Then we lowered the stage as the captain and engineer payed out the taut guy lines.

WE kept our eyes on the rope, listening to the steady throbbing of the pumps. The captain looked at his watch.

"How long has he been down?" asked the mate, coming on deck. From his post by the loud-speaker, Weissfelt answered, "Half an hour." Even as he spoke, Costello's voice came through the telephone.

"Here she is, buried in the sand. Buoy still fast." Slowly we pulled him up and helped him out of the armor.

"Well," asked the captain, "what's the job?"

"The stern has settled," Costello told us. "She is three fathoms deeper than she was last summer. There's a mountain of sand to be got away."

Then began a week of concentrated preparation, drills, instructions. First, the divers had to be broken in, as most of them had never been deeper than 100 feet. The engineer took six or seven at a time, put them on a stage and lowered them gradually in their heavy rubber suits. When they reached the total blackness of 250 feet, the mental and physical depression that seized them threw them into a panic. They shouted on the phone that they were sick, dying, anything to get to the surface. The engineer called

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soothing words to them, all the time lowering the stage. When they had reached the bottom and found themselves in the more cheerful twilight made by the reflection of the water on the sand, they felt better. If they did not recover from the panic and the physical discomfort, they were brought up and given work aboard ship, but most of them stuck it out.

THEY were a hardy, reckless lot. The bare maintenance that they received as wages made them take any risk to win their percentage of the find. I had seen their breed on the *Artiglio II*. During the last frantic week, they stayed down so long after their allotted hour that several dropped dead with the bends when they were brought to the surface. When they were within reach of the gold, they took the chance of torn tissues, ruptured nerves, and frightful muscular pains.

Soon the salvage boat was tied firmly to each end of the wreck and the divers were working with sand-suckers and grabs, clearing a way to the breach that Costello had located the year before. When they were on the salvage ship, they lightened their boredom by endless fights and quarrels below decks. The captain was a driver, but just. He and the engineer kept a vigilant watch and were careful to separate the Italians from the Cretans, the Cretans from the men of Samos. They were never sent down on the same stage, nor were men who had quarreled; it was too easy to cut an enemy's life line.

In the meantime we were busy above, checking our equipment. On the largest space of deck, we drew our chart. Costello outlined the *Hampshire* as she lay, showing the two holes that pierced her armor, the large jagged one through which we could not gain entrance and the small one on the bottom, aft of the first bulkhead, which he had found open on their initial trip.

Were they torpedo or mine holes? Costello could not be sure. The larger one was undoubtedly a mine hole, but the small one might have been made by a torpedo that hit on a slant and tore a jagged opening instead of the usual round hole. Of one thing he was positive: there had been no explosion from within as had been rumored in England, because the edges of the holes were bent in, not out. When the divers cleared the opening and worked into the first bulkhead, it was our job to break through the door, and so from bulkhead to bulkhead, until we reached the captain's cabin and the gold.

When the sand and debris were cleaned from the breach, Mansfield, Costello, and I went down to inspect. The day was unusually calm and the sink plates that we had lowered to test the underwater currents, indicated no cross-currents.

To go over the side on a bright day when the sun is irradiating the water is always intoxicating. The fish darting about in the upper layers, their fins gleaming in the blue light, give one a sense of well-being. The blackout zone lost most of its terrors in the armored suits that withstood pressure.

We kept on going down. In the great depths the diver, no matter what kind of suit he wears, is shut in with a terrible loneliness—with the feeling that there is nobody in the world but him and God. And in this dark wilderness of sea, it is a sharp personal encounter. I have talked to hundreds of divers and have never met one who has not had this experience.

At 385 feet, there was light enough to see our way around. The fine sand that our boots stirred made the water thick and murky, like fog. On the sandy bottom under the *Egypt*, I remembered, we had kicked up a white dust as if we were walking in the desert.

The hulk was slippery, but at that depth our suits seemed to have no weight. Exploring aft, below the poop

HIGHLIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

deck, we stumbled over skeletons. Where they were dislodged by our feet, we saw a ghastly thing—arms, hands, parts of legs on which the flesh had been preserved by their casing of sand.

The port side of the gun deck had been fairly cleared of wreckage. Each gun was loaded and beside it was a mound of skeletons with earphones on their heads, lying by shells that were never fired. These men had not deserted their stations. They must have believed that they had been hit by a submarine, for they went down standing by their guns, looking for revenge. In the forward hatchway, we stumbled over hundreds of skeletons, sailors who had tried to come up from below decks when the order was given to abandon ship.

At the small breach, luck was against us. A great mass of debris had blocked it from the inside, so we were pulled up and each took a stiff drink of Scotch to help us forget those poor fellows down below. At the end of the day, there was always plenty of Scotch for the Americans and English, beer for the Germans, and wine for the Italians and Greeks.

For the next few days, we stayed on deck while the divers worked into the hull. Then we went down to attack the first bulkhead, accompanied by several other divers to keep our lines clear. We were using a new method to drop off the armor plates. Where water had seeped in around the rivet heads and rusted them, we broke them off with pneumatic chisels, then pushed the rivets out with a pneumatic hammer. When the plates didn't fall clear of the wreckage, they were dropped to the bottom by the grab. The progress was slow, as we reckon work on land, but every day the hammers came nearer to the gold. Point by point, the advance was recorded by the chief engineer. At night the sand pumps thumped and in the morning the sand was spread over the ocean as far as we could see.

For those of us on deck the time dragged. On Easter Sunday, after our dinner of roast pig with an apple in his mouth and all the trimmings, I borrowed two pieces of paper from Weissfelt, whose pad, brought from a hotel in Berlin, was the only writing paper on board. I sat staring at the crest of the Eden Hotel, trying to make the most of the space to write my wife and daughter and hoping to have the letter mailed by one of the engineers who was going ashore for supplies. It was early April, the wind was raw, and I suspected that the treacherous crosscurrents were making hell for the men below. But the work went on. Every once in a while, we heard a dull plop as a piece of armor fell to the bottom.

By night the wind had risen to a gale. . . . There was nothing for it but to run to Stromness harbor.

WE were not encouraged to go ashore. Those four days cooped up on the idle ship, listening to the wind and watching the whitecaps foaming on the savage black waves that rushed the harbor, were enough to wear down any man's nerves. I remember how Weissfelt snapped at the first mate when he said that the North Sea could be as calm and beautiful as the Mediterranean.

Chiefly we talked about the *Hampshire*, not about our hopes for the gold—they were too intense for comfort—but about the fate of the cruiser and the men aboard. The long controversy about the manner of the sinking we fought again. Was the cruiser destroyed by a U-boat as the Admiralty had reported, or by a mine? How it happened that the War Minister of England and her greatest hero, not to mention the Bank of England's \$10,000,000 in gold, had been risked in the North Sea without certainty of a clear channel was a matter of endless speculation.

Sitting over our games of pinochle, we contributed what we knew and pieced together a fairly accurate picture of

the catastrophe. A year earlier, in 1932, I had heard that the police in New York had picked up Captain Fritz Duquesne, the same Duquesne who was convicted at the beginning of the Second World War as the head of a German spy ring. He was not a stranger to them; a versatile, prankish, enormously conceited fellow, he had escaped from the prison ward at Bellevue by faking paralysis and was not above twitting the police about it.

This time, Scotland Yard was looking for him. He had been boasting that he was the man who had killed Kitchener. Disguised as a Russian officer and furnished with the proper papers by the German Intelligence Service, he was supposed to have sailed with the English mission aboard the *Hampshire*. Off the Orkneys, he signaled a U-boat and escaped in it as the ship went down.

ONE of the officers told us a likelier story. He had known a German officer stationed with the code department at Neumünster. This young code expert's account was so credible that it appeared in a leading German weekly.

On the evening of June 1, 1916, this young officer was sitting in the code room with the lights dimmed, on the alert because he was expecting a big action by the German fleet. Spread out on the table were messages waiting to be decoded. The urgent one on which he was working interested the officer because of the two English words, "Orkney Islands." While he was puzzling over it, two other messages were picked up from English boats in the North Sea, identical messages: "Proceeding according to orders." Decoded, the first message was an Admiralty order to take a course west of the Orkneys, south to north, as the route was free of mines. Evidently two boats were following these orders. What boats, he wondered. Perhaps a torpedo boat escorting an important transport or a munitions ship. As these waters were usually clear of mines, the Admiralty must be sending a very important ship to take such precautions.

On June 2, the officer knew that Captain Kurt Beiten was ordered to proceed to the Orkneys as fast as possible in the underseas mine layer *U-57*. He laid thirty-four mines in the northerly course off the Orkneys and on the third, was back at his base in Helgoland.

On the evening of the sixth, the code officer at Neumünster heard an SOS directed to a special station in the north of England, saying that a ship had struck a mine and was sinking near the Orkneys. This was followed two hours later by several messages from English ships that were evidently searching for something more important than a torpedo boat. It was not until weeks afterward that the world knew about the sinking of the *Hampshire*, which drowned Lord Kitchener and 650 men.

Costello was inclined to credit this story because it fitted in with what he had been able to learn. Since his salvaging trip the preceding summer, he had become so interested in the fate of the *Hampshire* that he had spent some time digging up all the facts and surmises that he could find. He had discovered that the lonely watcher on the north coast who had received the SOS was so incoherent with horror that by the time he had stumbled to a telegraph station and awakened the sleepy operator, it took his message two hours to reach the Admiralty.

On that shore also was landed the handful of survivors. The only eyewitness that Costello could find was a sailor named Rogerson. At the first explosion, about seventy-three in the evening, the commander ordered all hands on deck and sent an officer to launch the captain's boat. Lord Kitchener came on deck with the other officers. As the ship was already listing badly to starboard, the commander shouted to Kitchener to come onto the bridge while the boat was being lowered. The war lord went to the bridge and stood by the commander. As the sailors tried to lower the longboat, four officers came forward to take Kitchener to it, but the Minister of War would not

budge. One of the officers seized him by the arm and attempted to drag him forward, shouting to the officers and men, "Make way for Lord Kitchener!" At that moment there was a second explosion, and the cruiser sank with no boats lowered.

Costello also had verified the rumors about the gold. It was true that in the government archives, at least so far as a private citizen could discover, there was no record of the \$10,000,000 in gold for the Russian government, but there was a record that this amount had been withdrawn from the Bank of England. Not even a wartime government draws \$10,000,000 secretly and makes no record of it unless it is intended for a very important mission.

All these stories were secondhand, but there was one man with our expedition who was more closely related to the event. He was Lieutenant Weissfelt. Max had been a German sailor during the First World War and had served on the mine layer *A-10* off the coast of Helgoland. The boat had covered a certain territory, laying mines and checking up every now and then to see that they were in their right places, especially after storms when they were likely to break loose or drag anchorage.

The day after the *Hampshire* sank, the *A-10* found that five of the mines in that part of her territory were missing. Max remembered them when he heard about Kitchener's death and checked in the little record book in which he entered the longitude and latitude of every mine in his territory.

After the war he wanted to forget everything connected with it, so he stuck the notebook away somewhere at home with his uniform. Perhaps he would never have looked at it again if he had not met Henry Row. Row was an Englishman, who was in Germany looking up every German sailor who had served with mine layers in that part of the North Sea. After he had followed many false clues, he met Weissfelt and learned about the little black notebook with the record and position of all the mines that had been laid off the Orkneys. Weissfelt was not at all sure that the book was still in existence. The two went to Max's old home in Stettin and searched through all his books and papers until they discovered it in an old trunk in the attic.

With these records to guide them, the two chartered a fishing boat and spent three years dragging the waters off Marwickhead Bank. When they had almost given up hope, they found the wreck. There could be no mistake, because Weissfelt went down in a diving suit and brought up a piece of the vessel that was lettered *H.M.S. Hampshire*.

"Then what did you do?" we asked.

Costello answered for Max: "You can be sure that he didn't sell his information to the British Admiralty, although he and Row tried hard enough. The Admiralty flatly denied that there was any gold aboard. Consequently, he formed his own syndicate. The gold's there, all right. All we've got to do is to haul it up when we get a break in this filthy weather."

THE next day we chugged out of the harbor in the face of a dying wind. We were a gloomy bunch, in spite of our relief at getting started. Suppose the storm had loosened a rack of the *Hampshire's* bombs? She was full of ammunition and torpedoes. We might find her scattered all over the floor of the North Sea with her gold buried in slime.

Costello and Mansfield went down, although the cross-currents were so strong that they had to crawl. In a few moments they pulled the signal rope. They didn't even wait to telephone. We who were hovering around the loud-speaker knew that something was wrong.

That evening in the captain's cabin, we held a consultation. The whole ship was buried anew in sand, they told us, and it would take weeks to clear another opening. Again the divers made their way toward the captain's

"Unlocking Adventure," by Charles Courtney

cabin. For seventeen days they worked, going down twice and sometimes three times a day in weather that was often so foul that they were risking their lives every time they went over the rail. The deck above the captain's cabin was dragged away by grabs, powerful ones that could lift fifty tons.

On the next trip I went down with Costello and Mansfield to open what we believed was the door to the gold. It was a still, bright Sunday morning, a perfect day, and we descended immediately after church, with the prayers still on our lips. Climbing over the wreckage, we unscrewed the dogs, the small levers that stop the bolt, attached the hoist-chain tackle to the airtight door, and slowly pulled it open. There in the sealed room were two perfectly preserved officers staring at us. The water flowed in gently and the countercurrent lifted the officers from their chairs and swept them past us. Reaching out my hook, I caught a hand. It came loose from the arm and I was left holding it while the rest of the officer floated by. On one of the fingers was a gold signet ring. I dropped it into my bag, thinking it would identify him, and threw away the ghostly hand.

GLANCING around for Mansfield and Costello in the dim flame of the submarine lamp, I saw that they were making for the door. Mansfield I heard calling for the emergency stage. When we reached the surface, we were all three so shaky that we couldn't stand. "I thought they were chasing us," muttered Costello, taking a long swig of whisky.

The next day we were so jittery that we didn't go down but lay in our bunks steadying our nerves with Scotch. Weissfelt and a German diver, Gruber, put on the armor to bring up the papers from the captain's cabin. Gruber was a good diver, but a gloomy soul and not afraid to express himself. They had not been down twenty minutes when he called the emergency. The two officers were floating about in the ship, pursuing them. It was fully a week before we were at normal work again.

We found the safes not in the captain's cabin but in the little anteroom beyond, six enormous strongboxes and a smaller one that was evidently the ship's own chest. The grabs could not reach these strongboxes without dynamiting, so they had to be opened where they were. I began on the smallest one, working for three days to cut the bar that engaged the lock. When the door gave, Weissfelt and Costello pressed forward so eagerly that the floodlights were too near to give a proper light. I raised my right hand to say O.K. and stepped back. The light fell on rows of splintered boxes disgorging gold coins dull and green with tarnish.

Costello pushed forward a canvas bag with a lead bottom and I dropped into it the coins, which were several times as heavy as lead. Costello dragged the bag back to Mansfield, who gave him an empty one and passed the loaded one on to the next diver. Bagful by bagful, the gold was passed back through several hands until the man at the breach loaded it on the bucket of the hoist. With the last bag we packed the ship's papers. They had not been kept watertight, but some of them might be legible.

Gold at last! On board the *K.S.R.* the diving gang went mad. Everyone had gold in his hands and was shouting what he would do with it when the job was done.

In the captain's cabin we tried to decipher the ship's papers and code books. The outer sheets were hopeless, but the inner ones had been pressed so tightly by the weight of the sea that they could be pulled apart and read. Yes, there they were, in precise military language, the orders for this expedition that was to bolster Russia with England's greatest soldier and her gold.

After working steadily for a week, we checked our salvage and found that, in addition to paper money, we had brought up £60,000 in gold. As supplies were running low, we heaved anchor and made for Stavanger. It had been arranged that the first gold would be deposited in England, but on the way the captain asked that it be taken to Germany. When the argument grew heated, I was elected referee. As this money was only a small part of the salvage and much of our success depended on the good will of our German crew, I decided for Berlin. Delegated to take the gold, I was landed with it and did not draw a normal breath until it was safe in the vaults of the Reichsbank.

It was April 29. Hjalmar Schacht himself thanked me and gave me an invitation to attend the great May Day celebration at which Adolph Hitler was to speak. I had heard that it was to be a mighty gathering and it looked as if everybody in Germany was there. My seat in the Tribune was so close to Hitler that I could easily have stuck a knife into him, but I was not impressed with the bare-headed little man in the shabby brown raincoat who spoke Low German and shouted in a high rasping voice.

On the third day we were back at Stavanger, but our luck had run out. All the time we had been away the *K.S.R.* had been hounded by such a storm that the crew were fuming and cursing. The captain was so glum that he would barely speak and the men kept out of his way.

Next day we put to sea again. Scarcely had the boat tied up to the wreck than Costello and Mansfield were over the side, only to find that once more the hulk was buried, inside and out, in seaweed and sand. That meant days of work to clear the passage again. Grimly the divers dug a new entrance, heart-breaking work in competition with the currents. All night and part of the day, the pumps spewed the sand upon the dirty sea. The weather was foul and our tempers were short.

Many a day the divers went down when the crosscurrents were so strong that they were flirting with death. Costello and Mansfield kept at it too, directing the job of forcing the bulkhead where the rest of the bullion was stored, reserving for me the final work of opening the safes. I was afraid that their nerves were stretching to the breaking point. When a diver loses his coolness and judgment, he is in grave danger. Kruger, one of the best German divers, was nearly killed when his line was fouled, and from that time on, Gruber was full of black forebodings. Between the liquor, the fog and rain, we were all as restless as a cage of wildcats.

One morning when the sink plates warned that to go over was a plain invitation to death, the captain ordered me to go with the other two on an inspection trip. Unless the current had washed in more sand, the strongboxes were uncovered. I looked at Costello. He was so exhausted that his hands twitched, and his face was flushed with anger, although I could see that he was trying his best to hold his tongue. Mansfield looked as if he had seen a ghost. They had done the gruelling work; I could afford to stand up to the captain.

"No," I said, "I won't go down in this weather. Look at your plates. It's suicide."

THE wrinkles in the captain's face grew taut. His watery eyes blazed. "What, yellow?"

"Call it that if you want. Your gold is no use to me when I'm dead. I won't go down until it's decent weather."

"Then you go down without him, Costello. You and Mansfield."

"No," snapped the lank Australian, "I want to live too."

The captain glared at us, his thin lips quivering. He walked to the door and back again. Then he stepped up to me and thrust out his hand.

"I'm sorry. It's this damned North Sea. It's getting me down."

We shook hands but there was no warmth in his voice.

All that day we sat in the cabin and played pinocle. We were miserable and self-conscious, thinking about the \$500 that each day cost, dollars that would be subtracted from the crew's percentage, and imagining that we could feel the Greeks hating us the way the captain did, cursing us under their breath because we were practically stealing their gold.

The next morning was little better, but Mansfield decided to go down and see if the boxes were clear. His line fouled and he was slammed against the walls of the hulk and pulled up unconscious, but by night was well again except for a dizzy head.

Next morning the weather was still foul but we decided to risk it. Costello, Mansfield, Weissfelt, and I went first in the armored suits, each on a separate stage, after the captain had said his prayers. Half an hour later, the rubber-suit divers followed. The current was so strong that they could not stand up and looked like horrible deep-sea monsters crawling toward us.

Forcing the bulkhead door farther back, we crawled into the bullion room where we found chest after chest of gold coins, twenty-ruble pieces. The boxes of gold were too heavy to drag out, so Costello and I broke them open, filling our bags with as many as we could manage and passing them back to Mansfield and Weissfelt, who started them down the line to the hoist. We had been working for two hours and should have gone up for new air, but the excitement of handling the gold kept us below.

Suddenly the water began to move to and fro. A cross-current snatched us. The bulkhead door was pushed almost shut, leaving us in total darkness. I was hurled against the wall so violently that I thought I was being torn apart. My left wrist broke and something crashed into my right side, stabbing me with agonizing pain. Hot blood ran down my right leg and a noise like Big Ben began to thunder in my ears, telling me that the air supply was giving out. Through the water, I could hear the screams of Weissfelt and Costello.

FOR an hour we were trapped, waiting to die. The horror of that hour is so vivid that even today, nine years later, the memory of its gives me a collapsed feeling in the pit of my stomach. The one image that tormented me was the grave of my son. Fiercely I prayed God that I might go back to it, not be left on this wreck, a skeleton to be kicked and trampled by other hunters for Kitchener's gold.

Then the current shifted. With all our strength, we forced back the door and inched toward the breach. Suddenly I felt the horrible fear that I was going to go mad for lack of air. Detaching the cable inside the suit, I reached the top deck, blew the ballast water out of the suit and popped to the surface of the water, hoping that Martin, the quartermaster who was on the lookout, would see me before the tide carried me away.

For about twenty minutes I floated, slapped about by the waves. Then I heard the sound of rowing coming closer and closer, every stroke vibrating through the water like a hammer blow. My iron coffin was too heavy to lift into the boat, so the crew tied a rope to an eyebolt in the helmet and towed me to the ship where the winch dragged me aboard. When my helmet was pulled off, I collapsed beside Costello who lay on deck with a crushed chest. Weissfelt had a broken spine, Mansfield was injured, and Kruger dead.

We heaved anchor and raced to an English port, where Sir Basil Zaharoff swore us to secrecy and rushed us to hospitals. For three days I lay on my back, living over in my delirium that hour of agony. On the fourth day the strength began to flow back into me and I asked for a barber. When he had finished shaving me he held up a mirror. I did not recognize the man who stared back at me; his hair was completely white.

MARIE, *Care of* SAINT JACK

*A Marine comes home to New Orleans and takes over
a strange civilian situation in this short novel—*

by Kenneth Perkins



A MARINE sergeant, home on leave from Paramaribo, walked up Canal Street as if walking on clouds. He imagined how the river-

men of the old steamboat days felt when they brought wild hogs and pipe staves down from Arkansas to this City of Joy. That was what they called New Orleans. Enough of corn meal and corn on a flatboat! It would be lake shrimps now, and Amontillado and a girl or two!

He went to a pension in the French Quarter to get rid of his suitcase and engage a room for the precious four days. The landlady stared at him, delighted.

"What the army does for you boys!" she exclaimed. "You were so thin, and you wore glasses when you went to Tulane, and your hair was longer. But now look at you! Even your eyes—how they dance! You are going to have a good time, M'sieur Paul!"

"That reminds me. You know that girl in the patio bookshop across the street—"

"She married a soldier. In the artillery, I think. *Tsk, ts!* If she'd only known you were coming!"

Sergeant Paul Hardy took a notebook from his blouse. He asked about another friend who studied art and painted fans. But she was in a factory now painting tanks or something like that. Still another had gone away to join the Red Cross.

"But you will find someone," said Mme. Moulin. "And before the day is over, doubtless."

Like any Marine on leave, Paul kept looking at his watch, and his address book. "There was a girl who used to come into Saint Jack's for a glass of sherry every morning—"

"Ah, but yes! Of course! She's been there every day waiting for you to come back from the wars."

"Boy, if you knew how that makes me feel!"

"I know how you feel, M'sieur Paul—like *Rex* landing on Canal Street on Mardi Gras morning!"

He went out in the warm haze. But the landlady called to him. "Oh, M'sieur Paul! There was something I forgot to ask you. When you were in South America, did you hear of a man captured by some Indians? A captive for many years until just now he escaped."

"South America is a bigger place than you think," Paul laughed.

"But yes. A foolish question. I only thought—Marie's father, he's supposed to come this morning—but never mind. A foolish question."

"Whose father?"

"Marie's." Madame chuckled. "I mention a girl's name and right away you are interested! But it's no matter. Well, have a good time, M'sieur *Rex*!"

Paul went to Saint Jack's cocktail lounge. Saint Jack was a silver-haired tub of a man who knew everybody in the Quarter, loved perique tobacco and raised canaries. He greeted the Marine and started squeezing mint for Paul's habitual morning bitters, as if he had been gone for a week-end instead of for many months.

No, the girl Paul asked about had just married a pharmacist's mate. "Haven't seen her for a week. 'Taint fair is it, you boys sent off to Paramaribo and all your girl friends get married up." He shoved the frosty glass across the bar. "On the house, Paul."

"Paramaribo! Listen, soldier." Another customer turned from the juke-box. "When you were down there, did you happen to hear of a captive—"

Saint Jack interrupted: "How would he hear about that! Marie's dad only cabled from there."

"I was just thinking," the man apologized, "he might've heard something, being he comes to town the same day as Marie's dad."

"Two men came to New Orleans from the same port and you think they must know each other," Saint Jack grunted. "You know how big Paramaribo is? Twice as big as Baton Rouge. So there!"

"But who is Marie?" Paul asked.

"Forget it," Saint Jack said, turning to a canary cage at the end of the bar. He packed two eggs in cotton and stuck them in a drawer of his cash-register. "I keep 'em away from the bird yonder, so they won't get broke when she fights with that cock canary—he's the father."

"You were talking of Marie's father," Paul said.

"Sure. But you don't know him. You don't know her either." Again Saint Jack changed the subject. "I keep these in here safe till she's finished laying all five eggs."

PAUL took out his note-book, not listening. He found one number, but the girl might not remember him. He would have to remind her, which would be embarrassing in the open cocktail lounge. He decided to use the phone booth in the tobacco shop next door.

The tobacconist, Hank Lee, greeted him in the same way. "Back again! It's been how long? Six months? A year? Have a cigar for lagniappe."

Paul thumbed his notebook to find that number again, swearing because the girl's name had escaped him, although he'd had it but a minute ago. The singing of Saint Jack's birds next door confused him.

Or else it was the tobacconist mentioning that name Marie again which knocked the other name out: "Say, Paul, I wanted to ask you something. When you were down there in Paramaribo, did you happen to hear of a man taken prisoner by some Indians? Well there's a girl here in the Quarter, her name's Marie—"

"Say, who is this Marie, anyway?"

"Yo-ho! You wouldn't ask that if you'd ever seen her, because you'd remember her! Keeps that little perfume shop a square down yonder. You never bought cologne, I reckon—not in that shop. Because if you'd been in that shop—"

"I remember a little kid with hair plastered squaw fashion, and a white face. But, come to think of it, she had awfully big eyes. Just a kid though."

"You'd be surprised how they grow up."

Paul put his notebook into his blouse again, and went to Marie's perfume shop.

THIS was a great day for Marie as well as for Paul. Since her father, gone for eight years, was coming home, this day would be greater than Carnival. It was more like that other day in New Orleans, All Souls', when the dead return to those they love.

To be ready for him, she had changed her make-up which ordinarily gave her the appearance of a Parisian shop girl—the better to sell her perfumes. He would not like her thin face powdered so white with hair combed sleek as a crow's-wings over her skull. Daybreak through the transom between her shop and bedroom—a light from the sky above Mississippi Sound—gave her the hue to match in tinting her nails. It would be more attractive in her father's eyes than the usual claret red—for he would still consider her a child.

She imagined herself that same child again waiting for him to bring home a plug of black candy or a stick of sugar cane or muscadines. She remembered how he brought home strange plants—this was when they lived in the marsh country south of New Orleans—and how he would teach her to distill them into a rich perfume, richer than the *vertivert* that grows on the sides of the bayous. She felt that same eagerness of waiting, the counting of minutes, the listening for footsteps.

She listened until mid-morning, watching through the shop window where the light shone in tiny perfume bottles. And now through the glitter of green and amber she saw a Marine looking at her.

She gave him a smile, of course, because they deserved it—these boys in the armed forces. A smile from her, she happened to know, would send a pleasant warmth through him. She knew it, not because of conceit, but for the simple reason that they all told her so.

This time her smile broke into a gay little laugh because as the Marine was about to come in, another man slipped in ahead of him. It was precisely like that parlor game called musical chairs. Since the Marine without doubt, intended to make love to her, he sauntered off, evidently preferring to wait until she got rid of this customer—or whatever he was.

He was not a customer. He was Kent Dickson, the young Creole sculptor who had a studio in the Quarter. His entrance filled the feminine setting with a satisfying, earthy scent, due to the oil and clay he used in molding Carnival masks. It gave Marie's nostrils, which had almost the delicacy of an animal's, a new recipe for a perfume. She ran from behind her counter and hugged him.

"It's a great day for both of us," Kent laughed. "I've just got my appointment to Pensacola. The next time you see me I'll have wings."

"You have them now, the way you look to me."

He looked, despite his sloppy clothes, very elegant, somehow—with bronze-black curls, tanned throat and a chin dimpled and square like one of his own statues. "Anyway we've got to get married before Friday."

"I'm ready."

He stared at her as usual. "You've changed your hair or something. I didn't think it could be done, but you're ten times prettier."

"I was thinking how my father would remember me. I guess I was really making myself up for you without knowing it."

But he still stared. "It's about your father—that's why I came over to talk to you. You'll want to wait so he can come to the wedding, of course."

"But he's coming today!"

"That's just it, honey—I mean the point I wanted to get clear. How did you find out that he was coming this very day?"

"What's so queer about that? Or is it your mother who thinks it queer? That's it, isn't it, Kent?"

"Well, I—" He mopped his forehead because the morning was getting hotter. She turned on the electric fan. "Honey, there's no use hiding things from you. Yes, it was Mother. That is, she said she was just wondering how you could know the exact day. You said even the cable was censored so he couldn't tell you what ship he came on."

Marie rearranged the bottles under the glass case top and broke a finger-nail. "Saint Jack told me. He has a friend down at Head of Passes. A pilot. He knows what ships are coming up the river. My father didn't cable me anyway. He doesn't even know where I live. He sent me the message in care of Saint Jack."

"I asked Saint Jack the same thing, but he only changes the subject and talks about his canaries."

She looked up from filing her nail. "Oh, so you've been asking Saint Jack what he knows about my father?"

"Mother told me to. Now don't get mad. I like to come right out with everything. Mother's doing her best to break our engagement—I never tried to hide that from you. All I want is a good argument to answer her with. But I can't seem to get any facts. If there were only some facts, I could put an end to this funny gossip that's getting around."

She held her breath a minute. "Gossip—about me?"

"Of course not! Who would ever gossip about you, I'd like to know! It's about your father."

"I haven't heard any gossip about him," she said steadily.

"There wasn't any until this thing about a tribe of Indians comes up. Everyone understood your father went to South America and never came back. No one thought anything more of it. But now that he comes back—well, it's got Mother on her ear, for one. She can't stop our marriage and she knows it. But she's going to do her best. She's going to fight hard."

Marie sharpened her nail to a fine point. She was thinking for the moment of a bottle she had that smelled like oil of bitter almonds—the nitric acid and benzol used in perfumery. Quite the thing for a detective-story murder, she thought!

Kent, still talking, leaned over the showcase, trying to reach for her busy hands. "Actually Mother's consented—it's her grand Creole way she has of consenting—to our engagement. We can get married and have the blessing of the whole Dickson family, she says, if she can only find out who your father is!"

"She'll find out! He's really a great man. He's a genius. He's a botanist. That's why he went down there to South America. They make tropical perfumes down there out of rosewood and vanilla and tonka—he wanted to study about that. But then he was lost."

"I've told Mother all that. And she can see my point of view. She admits you're wonderful. How can she help it? But—"

"But she wants to see my father. All right. When she does see him she'll be sorry for everything she ever thought."

"That's just why she's coming down this morning—so she can meet him when he comes."

Marie's eyes snapped up. "I'll be nice to her," she said, putting fresh polish on the broken nail. "I'll be very sweet to her, because of you. I love you, anyway." She dried the enamel as if playing a harp.

But then she thought: "So Mrs. Dickson is coming down to do the investigating herself, is she? I can see her driving down Front Street asking skippers if they know anyone who's been to Paramaribo. No, that's nonsense. I can't see Mrs. Dickson on Front Street!"

But her eyes darted to the window, half expecting to see the grand Creole lady out there spying on her.

Through the rainbow of bottles she saw a grinning wind-tanned face, rampant with life. It was that Marine again.

CHAPTER TWO



KENT DICKSON could not just stand there listening to Marie talking to a customer, especially when the customer wanted to

flirt with her—which, needless to say, this Marine intended to do. Kent had stood by once before, and it was very embarrassing. He had even started a fight. It was disgraceful! "I'll drop in at lunch time," he said to Marie. "We'll have lunch with Mother."

"You've forgotten I can't leave the shop today," she said. Then in her business voice, "Something for you, Sergeant?"

Her business voice was a regular love song, Sergeant Hardy thought. He did not notice the distracted young man who had just gone out, nor had he heard what he said. He was too busy looking at Marie. He looked as if he had been knocked on the chin. "Can I believe my eyes!" he said aloud.

"Yes, m'sieur?" she said in a still more businesslike way, which was still more enchanting. "Can I show you something?"

"Just a bottle of cologne to send to a friend."

"Does she live up North?"

"What gave you that idea?" The Marine had thought of no one anywhere to whom he could send this cologne.

"I merely asked because perfumes best in New Orleans are specially distilled for a drowsy climate. Now here is something."

"I've seen you before," Paul said. "I used to live here in the Quarter. Everybody knows me. I know everybody. But I thought you were only a little kid. I thought maybe your mother owned the shop and you were helping her."

"Then you know Kent Dickson who just went out?"

"I didn't notice anyone but you. But I know that name. Sure. Dickson. Rich Creole family. Nice fellow." That dismissed Kent Dickson and they got back to the subject. "Of course you wouldn't remember me."

Marie looked straight at him for the first time. It was her habit to study a customer before suggesting a perfume. As a result she had developed some skill at character reading. His eyes were the same as all the others in the armed forces—clear and bright, his skin glowing.

"I have just the thing! The smell of the woods and the sea combined, which makes it a special blend for a Marine." She picked out a heart-shaped bottle and unscrewed the gilt stopper. "The smell of floating turf in the bayous—that's the woods and the sea! It's something my father loved. He would search the bayous for new bulbs or weeds and have his pockets stuffed with them when he came home—"

"I've heard about your father."

"Yes, everyone in the Quarter knows," she said. "He's coming today! From South America, you know."

"That's where I'm from."

She looked up, her eyes smart. He just wanted to stay here and talk with her. Naturally enough. That's why he said he was from South America. "Let me have your



"Can I believe my eyes!" the Marine said aloud.

hand, m'sieur. Like this." She turned his hand and touched the wet stopper to the underside of his wrist.

"There. Do you like it?"

"It's just right!"

"A touch behind your ear. Like this."

"I was with that force Uncle Sam sent down there—to Dutch Guiana. The name of the port was Paramaribo."

Her eyes snapped up again, as bright as a chinquapin eater's. Of course he was fooling. He had heard of that seaport right here in the Quarter. But she must be polite about it. "I declare! You were down there! Now this bottle, you must keep it out of the light. New Orleans climate is bad for colognes."

"He'd just escaped from a tribe of Indians, hadn't he? What was the tribe now?"

"Djukas," she said readily. "I'll put this in a velvet-lined box for you. Something special, because you are in the Service."

"That reminds me." He took out a bracelet he had bought down in Surinam from a silversmith. "When your dad comes, I'd like to see him. I want to ask him if he knows anything about this stuff. The Indians make it."

Her blue lids dropped as she pretended to look at the bracelet. "But over on Royal Street," she said, "any of those antique dealers will tell you what you want to know about bracelets."

"I'd rather have a man who's really been down there appraise it. I'll leave it and come back."

"No, please. I couldn't be responsible for any jewelry left here! I can see it's something for a museum."

"Nothing of the kind! It's only silver. Different tribes make different marks. Symbols, they call them. I have a suitcase full. If you lost it I wouldn't care at all. In fact you can keep it. It's yours."

"No, m'sieur, I couldn't accept it. My fiancé wouldn't like that."

"Tell him it's from your dad. He sent it by a friend from South America. I'm the friend."

"My fiancé," she persisted, "he was that young man who went out just as you came. Kent Dickson. I saw him give you a look—"

"He was just trying to place me," Paul said logically. "If it was Kent Dickson, he's seen me lots of times, but never in uniform. You can tell him I gave it to you. My name's Paul Hardy."

She shoved the bracelet across the counter at him, but her hand stopped uncertainly. She picked it up. Then slowly she began to smile. "A friend of my father brought it to me," she said, half to herself. "What a notion! But not such a bad one!"

She put it on her slim wrist, which reminded Paul that her skin was like the *crêpe myrtle* out there in her patio. He noticed too that she was the loveliest thing he had ever seen in his born days. No wonder she had caught the heir to the Dickson fortune! Kent Dickson, being a sculptor, had judged the beauty of that pale face and those pale hands.

"I'll keep it," she said in her low voice. "But of course I mean, I'll buy it."

"What are you talking about! I said I was giving it to you."

"Then I'm giving you this perfume." She fitted the bottle in the heart-shaped nest in the box and wrapped it. As she handed it to him, her eyes looked across his shoulder to the street. In a complete change of tone, she said, "And will that be all, m'sieur?"

This sudden dismissal was like a slap, except that he knew something had frightened her. He turned to look at the street and saw an old phaeton with a Negro coachman. In back sat a gray-haired lady with a parasol.

Mrs. Dickson was patriotic and saving rubber, but in doing so, she must have known that she created quite a stir. The picture of her riding in that phaeton brought back the Old South, the Deep South, in this case the Creole South. She turned time backward in that street of pastel colored houses and galleries of slave-hammered iron. It was the same street as it was before the Civil War, and down the square a little way there was the same house where Mrs. Dickson's great-grandmother had been hostess to the royal *émigrés* of France.

Sergeant Paul Hardy gave her only a glance and looked back at Marie's hot angry eyes. He wondered if she were angry at him or at Mrs. Dickson or, perhaps, at both. "Come again, m'sieur," she said, meaning, "Please go away. Can't you see I have this important customer to attend to?"

The horses had clip-clopped to a stop and Mrs. Dickson stepped down to the sidewalk. It might have been the sidewalk of the old days made from the gunwales of ships.

"I'll come again all right," Paul said to himself. "I've only got four days—not long enough to wait for an engagement to be broken. I'll make love to her, anyway. But it's got to be fast."

He went to Saint Jack's. He went with the definite intention of getting a question answered. He intended to say: "Saint Jack, tell me something. That girl says her dad was taken captive by some Indians called the Djukas. Well, Djukas aren't Indians; they're bush Negroes and they never harm a white man, anyway. Besides, I told her I'd just been down there, where her dad was a captive for eight years. So why didn't she ask a thousand eager questions? She just changed the subject to perfumes, the way you do to canaries. What's this yarn you're trying to make us believe? Who is Marie's father, anyway?"

ADERELICT with a long gloomy face like Andrew Jackson's, trudged from the Union Bus Station to the heart of the French Quarter. Burgundy, Dauphine, Bourbon—each cross-street seemed farther than the last, for his feet were swollen. He could tell hurricane weather by the swelling of his feet. But today it was due to a new pair of shoes. Besides, he had not done so much walking in eight years.

Resting, he faced a shop-window mirror, wondering why a policeman had given him that second look. It was, perhaps, his lank body and haggard eyes that made him stand out in a crowd. In the window he saw that his dull eyes had turned bright.

The little girl's eyes, he remembered vividly, were stars. She got the Cajun shine of them from him, the blackness from her mother. His heart thumped eagerly as if a hammer covered with cotton beat a steady rhythm inside him.

IT was a long way from Texas, sometimes tramping, sometimes hitch-hiking, finally taking a bus. The pinch of his feet lied about a hurricane, for the Quarter was balmy in sunshot mist. The contradiction made him apprehensive. He must think this out. "He had been in South America for eight years." He must stick to that. "He had cabled from Paramaribo to Marie, care of Saint Jack." He must remember that seaport. He had picked out the name from the newspapers, not exactly at random, but because of the write-ups about the place, where our armed forces had just recently been sent.

He felt that he was home even though he had never been to New Orleans except on rare visits from the marsh country many years ago. But he still remembered the smell of steaming patios and of crawfish bisque which the restaurants served in spring. He smelled the river which was now only four squares to the south and east. The gentle wind from there brought him a whiff of the coffee docks, the French Market—cushaws, persimmons, sand-buggers, oranges. And there was the vast pervading murky smell of the Mississippi. It all belonged to him somehow. He owned it in his day of freedom. He owned the world!

Yes, this man—like the Marine who had really come from Paramaribo—was Rex landing on Canal to take over the City! He had told his daughter once of those strange creatures in masks—half devil, half angel but wholly good—who landed on a Tuesday once a year. He remembered her eyes, the almond shape turning round and huge. She was a tiny slip of a child to him and she might not have grown much taller, he reflected. Her mother was small and had slender ankles and wrists. Perhaps she would still be about the size of a ten-year-old girl. Eighteen or about nineteen—h'm! That would make her a woman, now!

He reached her street when it occurred to him that he must have a smile ready. He attempted one and to his consternation found that it made his upper lip tremble! He put his finger in the line that came down from his long thin nose to the edge of his mouth and, trying another smile, felt the muscles actually twitch.

A smile was physically impossible.

Rye would settle those jumping little face-muscles quickly enough. Besides, Saint Jack had written him to be sure and drop in before he saw his daughter. It was a miserable complication, a delay of a few minutes when every minute, now that he was about to see Marie, was an eternity. But he swung into the fern-hung, cage-hung lounge.

The benign bartender blinked eyelashes which, unlike his silvery hair, were carrot red like his face. Hence he seemed to have no lashes at all. His eyes just blinked on and off. Then he put out both hands, and shook with Lank Jeffries. "Sure glad to see you, Lank! Warms my heart."

"Thought I'd have a little smile with you before I see her."

Saint Jack reached to the bar mirror where he kept his liquors, soda pop, bird wash and "song restorer." He drew beer for himself and said gloomily, "Here's regards."

The father sensed that something was wrong.

"Marie's all right?"

"She's on top of the world. Her troubles are over."

"Troubles? She wrote nothing about—"

"Of course not. She didn't want you to brood. I mean just the usual troubles any girl alone in the world has. Wait a minute—"



St. Jack came out fuming: "Bustin' my eggs! I'll bust their chins open—the whole gang!"

"But I'm in a hurry, Saint Jack."

"Sure. But I want to tell you something important before you see her. Her hard times are over. She's been going around with a fellow—he sculps statues but he's all right. He's rich too—and a Creole, what's more."

The father said, nodding. "Kent Dickson, I know. I was worried when she wrote about him. I thought she might be getting in too deep."

"What do you mean, worried? Because he belongs to an old Sugar Bowl family, maybe you thought he wouldn't marry her? Is that what you mean?"

"She's as good as he is," the father answered.

"Sure. And that's what *he* thinks. He wants to marry her and she wants him. How do you like that!"

Lank Jeffries' eyes were burning. "Glad to hear all that, Saint Jack."

"Sure, you're glad to hear it. She's been slaving long enough—a young kid running that shop without help, making a go of it. Now she lands on top of the heap. Course you're glad. So am I. But this boy who wants to marry her, how glad do you think *he'll* be if he finds out—" Saint Jack checked himself as another customer came in. They moved to the end of the bar while the customer waited, whistling at one of the canaries.

The father's skull hummed, distracted by the singing which was like a charivari of the old New Orleans days designed to wake good people up. "Kent Dickson!" the father said. "He won't find out!"

"His mother will. She's a fussy old dame asking everywhere what Marie's father's been doing all these eight years? Why, I saw her just now riding by here in her carriage." He lowered his voice earnestly. "You see, Lank, everybody believed it when Marie said you'd been lost down there in South America. Everything was easy, all indefinite-like. But when you come back, it's got to be definite. Get me? I mean the place you were at, the tribe that got you, all that stuff. Your coming back—it means you're going to be asked a heap of questions. You and Marie both!"

The father gasped. "You don't mean—I shouldn't come back to my—"

"To your own little kid, I know what you're thinking. A motherless kid at that. But what I mean is, if you thought of it from her angle. If you just gave her a chance! It aint too late. I could spread it around that the rumor about your escaping from Indians was all hokey. You were lost down there. You stayed lost. Then I'd explain to Marie you've decided it's the best way out. You can explain it yourself, because you can still write to her. You'd still write care of me, of course, so her husband wouldn't catch on. She'd be happily married—"

Lank Jeffries gripped the bar to stop the shake of his hands. "I've been thinking every day for years of coming back like this. No! Saint Jack! You couldn't ask me to do that!"

Saint Jack gave an enormous sigh. "O.K., Lank. I've had my say. So that's that. Go and see her. She's waiting for you—and eager, I happen to know."

He turned to the customer who had been waiting and playing with the canaries. The customer was lovelorn as well as thirsty.

He was a sergeant of Marines.

CHAPTER THREE



HE fragrance of patio flowers drifted in here so that Sergeant Hardy imagined himself still in that perfume shop.

"Another of the same?" the bartender said, waking him up.

"Lord, but she's a beauty, Saint Jack!" He kept looking through the potted palms to the soft hot light of Marie's street. Above the tinted buildings clouds like petals of morning-glories sailed the sky as far away as Mobile.

"You picked up a friend, seems like," Saint Jack observed.

Paul Hardy showed him the velvet box with its vial, and Saint Jack seemed to smell the perfume with his eyes. "The hell of it is," Paul said, "she's engaged, as you know."

Saint Jack crushed mint fiercely. "Everybody falls in love with Marie, especially the armed forces." He tried to laugh. "But you got some sense, Paul, and you got education. Didn't Tulane educate you?"

"I've seen her only a few minutes and I've made up my mind. Those other girls we used to talk about, you used to give me advice about—I never wanted to marry 'em. They were all right, but the idea just didn't hit me. This time it hit me on the chin."

"You aren't going to marry this one either. Here's regards." He held up his glass. "On leave for a few days and you think you're going to marry somebody. Hell, where do you think you are, Australia? Besides, you got to know a girl first."

"Know something about her? I see what you mean. About her family and all that? Well, I happen to know all about her dad." He waited for this crafty remark to take effect. "I know all about him—where he was for the last eight years, everything. And it doesn't make the slightest difference! Nobody in the Quarter bothers about who a girl's dad is. On the other side of Canal, yes, it makes a difference. But not on this side. We aren't prudes here. If her father's done something that has to be covered up, some people might object, especially those old families out on St. Charles. But not me!"

Unable to catch his breath to stop this incredible speech, Saint Jack gasped, turned and punched his cash register—a good punch. He was going to get those eggs out, Paul



Lank muttered: "Can't I look at my own daughter?"

thought, so he could change the subject. But he swung around, livid and shaky-lipped. "I wouldn't say that!"

"Say what?"

"What you just said. You know damn' well what you just said. It's a rumor gotten around."

"I'm not spreading the rumor," Paul Hardy objected, "since you're the one man who knows the truth already."

"It's a rumor, and I'll tell you who's spreading it. Kent Dickson's mother. Marie isn't good enough for him—a little shop-girl selling perfumes, and him having his pick of all the Creole belles in town!" He could have changed the subject then, because one of his tamer canaries, given the freedom of the place, was on his shoulder picking out a thread from his white jacket. But, to Paul's surprise, he stuck to the subject this time.

"I know Marie's dad," Saint Jack said. "He's all right. Knew him down in Cameron Parish years back before he—" He finished quickly: "Before he went to South America. We were pals. I had a filling station and bar for those Cajuns. And he was a trapper, got gas from me. Trapped muskrats for a rich guy from Chicago in the fur business. Everybody liked Lank Jeffries—that's her dad's name. Even the Chinks down there in the shrimp camps liked him because he knew all about herbs. That's why he went to South America, hunting new species as he called 'em."

"I believe everything you say up until that last remark. It's a big jump from the shrimp camps to South America."

Saint Jack puffed angry clouds of perique. Through the smoke, at a distance, like someone walking on the clouds, he saw Kent Dickson.

Kent was coming toward the row of potted plants which separated the open lounge from the sidewalk.

In a panic Saint Jack said, "Listen, Paul. All right. It's me and you know it. But there's lots you don't know. And I'm going to tell you the rest." He grabbed Paul's glass. "Come on in the back yard and we'll have this one together, sitting down."

It was easy. He led Paul to one of the slate-top tables out there among the wine barrels and magnolias. He mumbled something about getting the mint and ice, then shut the back door, leaving Paul outside and alone.

As Kent Dickson stepped in, Saint Jack was at his post, puffing. "What'll it be, Kent?"

"Just looking for somebody. You know Paul Hardy? They said he came in here. I didn't recognize him because of his uniform."

"Oh, him! Sure, he looks swell in his uniform."

"Just heard he's home from Paramaribo and I'd like to ask him something."

Saint Jack got some dandelion and wild pepper from a cigar box. "He aint here. He was here, but he went over to Bob Wattles' oyster bar. You look hot. What'll it be?"

"Thanks, but I've got to hurry." Kent turned for the street.

"If he aint at the oyster bar, you'll find him at the French Market," Saint Jack called to him, hoping he would hunt for a long time. "He said he never feels he's really back home in the Quarter till he gets some mirirltons at the French Market."

Saint Jack hurried to his back door with the mint and ice. But he stopped to feed a shred of the crushed mint to a canary. He needed a moment to gather his wits. He must keep this Marine and Kent Dickson apart, no matter what happened. It might be difficult.

"But," he said half aloud to his canary, "there are ways."

IT was hardly a whole square from Saint Jack's to the perfume shop. Marie's father started to trudge that short journey, his shoes hurting him like tourniquets. He had put them on, a new pair, on the day he was free. And now they made this last lap intolerable. Half a square stretched to eight years.

The sound of Saint Jack's canaries followed him, reminding him of the first spring when he could hear the birds in the woods but could not see them. Nor could he see the first trees that blossomed. These would be the pecans. That spring, he told himself at the time Marie was eleven.

He passed the millinery shop. That reminded him of Easter when the locust trees bloomed. He could see them through his bars. That first Easter he thought, "What does a little girl look like after a year? Thinner and taller, jumpier, her eyes darting faster." The wild geese made him think of her when he saw them crossing the square of sky above the Yard, heading north from the Gulf.

Each year at a certain time he could smell the myrtles, knowing that they were huge rose-colored bouquets although he never saw them. He could only see their beauty in his mind in the same way that he saw his daughter growing to a young girl. In August he caught the thick scent of cotton blooms and remembered them and remembered her white face, wondering if any color had come to it yet. It might be whiter and thinner, for he heard that she was homeless.

Time dragged to the end of a winter, to the live oaks with new leaves pushing out the old, to another summer. He imagined himself then in Louisiana where the jasmine would keep on blooming as late as September, where the wild geese were coming south once more to sea marshes and the mallards were coming back to feed on the wild rice of the pump lands. What did a girl look like when she passed over from a child?

He reached the candy shop near Marie's when he saw that phaeton and the coachman, fat and black as a porpoise, sitting up there. The *Zulu King* riding up Rampart in the Negro Mardi Gras could not have been greater!

This coachman was a Creole servant and he knew it, gazing down his flat nose at the white man who seemed to be only a vagrant and trash. Creole, that meant tops. He was at the top of his race. Lank Jeffries was at the bottom of his.

"But you'll be driving my daughter around Audubon Park in this carriage!" It gave Lank Jeffries a thrill, saying that to himself. "She'll be mistress of the big white house on St. Charles, and of the plantation out in the Sugar Bowl where they had eighty slaves *dans le temps*." Marie's mother would have smiled at such a happy ending to the sad story!

But Lank Jeffries for the first time thought of what Saint Jack had said. Saint Jack was kindly and wise. "If you gave her a chance!"

He turned from the phaeton, looking at the window where the bottles made a Borealis of light. His eyes shone back, dazzled. He loitered.

A policeman passing noticed his dejected shoulders, the irresolution, the special color of his skin. Lank Jeffries was straining his eyes fiercely for a glimpse of Marie. But he could not see her because, as he guessed, she was in the patio in back serving coffee and anisette to the terrifying Mrs. Dickson.

The policeman saw him still standing there, watching the window hungrily. "Hey, you." His hand without any movement of his arm made an easy, flipping gesture, motioning the vagrant on.

But the vagrant did not go. He looked at the policeman aghast, as much as to say, "What do you mean?"

"What you looking at, in that window?"

Lank clenched his fist and muttered under his breath, "Can't I even look at my own daughter?"

The policeman shoved him.

Lank had mumbled the words voicelessly, only his lips moving. He unclenched his fist. There must be no scene. Not with Marie and her future mother-in-law and her future coachman close enough to witness it!

The father turned and wandered down Saint Anne to the docks of the Mississippi.

MARIE sat in her patio, cornered. She was not so lovely, after this hour of questioning, as Kent had always painted her. She looked like a rag, her upper lip moist, tight, the rouge smirched. Her hands were wet in the palms. Her fragile face, always white but vivid, had turned wan like a flame that is going out.

The manner of Mrs. Dickson's inquisition was exquisite. Apparently she had not come to ask Marie a single question except the one which should have given the girl a great lift of spirits. She had come, she said, just to find out what day Marie had chosen for the wedding!

Marie gaped. Too timid to stare at Mrs. Dickson straight in the eyes, she looked at her figure, smoothly tailored in purple. Except for her neck which was seared by her fifty years, she could have passed as Kent's elder sister.

"I told my Kent, 'Why, of course you must be married right away.' I told him he must settle things quickly, what with this war on. He is going to be a flyer, of course you know. And you know what I'm thinking. He may never come back. I want him to be married, naturally. And since he has chosen you—" She paused a moment honestly surprised at how pretty Marie was when the inquisition started. "What an effect that bracelet makes on your skin!" she exclaimed. "And I didn't notice your hair-do at first. Some sort of teen-age effect, isn't it? Anyway it's different this morning. And your eyes! I know you must be in love very deeply."

Marie brought her back to the subject, hoping to end it. "I told him I was ready, right now."

Mrs. Dickson tapped her smooth slipper with her parasol. She cleared her throat as if about to make a difficult and vital statement. But she managed only to say, "There's a customer in your shop, waiting, I think."

And that gave Mrs. Dickson time to change the subject gracefully. She said, when Marie served the customer and came back, "I keep thinking when I look at you, dear—thinking of what happened to me at your age. The thrill of it, the triumph, the whole City at my feet! No, I don't mean my wedding day. I mean when I was queen. What a Carnival week that was! I was queen the year before too—of Comus that time. But I'm speaking of the great time. When I was queen over all. I actually felt that I owned the City—as they say."

FERVENTLY, Marie said: "I know how you felt; I feel that way every time Kent comes in this shop." She sensed that she was on the wrong tack. "Will you have some more coffee?"

"Thank you. But no orange peel this time. The thing that I remember most about that Carnival," she went on, "it's not the Tuesday—the Fat Tuesday, and the cheering crowds and the dancing on Canal which we watched from a high window; not the masks and the music! Not at all! It was the awakening on Wednesday—that's the drama you can't forget. Can you imagine how a young girl of nineteen feels on that morning, Ash Wednesday? The packing away of all the robes which I could never wear again! Your age, and with nothing more to look forward to but Lent! After those gorgeous balls for Comus and Rex and Momus—the dream was over! It was only pretending. It was a hoax. I wasn't really a queen at all. I only thought I owned the City!"

Marie stared at her, hollow-eyed. She knew what Mrs. Dickson meant now. There was to be an awakening. Lent was coming. She said in a trembling voice. "There won't be any Lent—not for us!"

Mrs. Dickson said, suddenly bubbling: "Kent tells me you are expecting your father today!"

"Yes, I— There's another customer. I'll be right back."

When she returned, she hoped miserably that the subject would be changed again. But Mrs. Dickson said tenaciously, "I heard about your father in a roundabout way. From Madame Fouchart's while I was looking over the new books in her shop. She knows a lot of Cajuns in Terrebonne Parish."

Marie, instead of sitting, stood transfixed. "We were from Cameron Parish, not Terrebonne."

"It might have been there. But she had heard of a trapper whose wife and little girl came to New Orleans to live. What had happened to the trapper himself, she did not know."

"She was talking about my father, you think? Why couldn't it have been another trapper? There are lots of them, with wives and little girls too."

"But this one was a man who collected herbs and sold them, or gave them, to the Chinese in the shrimp camps down there. From what Kent tells me of your father—"

"He went away, hunting herbs. He was lost," Marie said desperately.

"So Madame Fouchart said. She said he disappeared and the mother and little ten-year-old girl hunted the marsh for days, thinking the hurricane might have taken him out to the Gulf in his pirogue—or was it a cabin dory?"

"Yes, that was what happened," Marie admitted, for this, after all, admitted nothing.

"But the hurricanes blow the other way, I'm just repeating what Madame Fouchart said. I don't want to repeat inaccurate statements. It makes it sound like gossip. There should be no gossip about a family when marriage is being considered."

"What's inaccurate about it? When we say the hurricane took his dory out, we mean the *revanche*," Marie explained excitedly. "The tides of the *revanche* take boats out."

"Why, of course!" Mrs. Dickson said and Marie sighed in relief. "Madame Fouchart should have known that, instead of being so mysterious. 'The hurricane blows the other

way!' that was how she put it. So I thought I would ask you, merely to clear up the doubt."

"There is no doubt!"

"No, except how did he get to South America? Not because of the revanche, surely?"

Marie twisted her handkerchief in a little ball. "We found out that a tanker had picked him up, a tanker from Galveston."

"How did you find out?"

"Why, he wrote to my mother, of course."

"From where?"

"I can't remember the town. I was a little girl. I only knew I was terribly frightened." Marie's voice was steadier for a moment, because she was telling the truth now. "It's the worst fear a little girl can have—that her father is lost."

"But the town where you heard from him?"

"Please! I said I can't remember. My mother didn't like to frighten me talking about it."

"Not even when he stopped writing and she thought he was lost?"

"No. She knew that would frighten me more than ever. He went into the jungle. Some Indians—"

"She didn't write down there to the consul or somebody to find out?"

"My mother wasn't well. And she grieved all the time, day and night. I remember that. It was just a little after that, that she died."

This stopped the inquisition, but only momentarily. Mrs. Dickson was a lady even when she was a tigress fighting for her son. She was to the manor born, and here was only a shop girl to fight, a nondescript little thing who was said to be halfbreed French. Her father might have been a redbone for all anyone knew about him! What if she was a beauty? They were beauties in the old times when high-born gentlemen went to the Quadroon balls after the Creole balls were over. This outrageous thought occurred to Mrs. Dickson when she noticed the incredibly black sparkle of the girl's eyes. She even glanced at her fingers to see if there was any betraying citrine in her nails. But Marie's nails were tinted the color of sunrise. Nor was there any blue touch to her eyeballs. "A redbone, anyway! Neither white nor colored, but a mysterious mixture, perhaps with Indian blood for all Kent will ever find out!" That was something to fight about!

But Mrs. Dickson was a lady. "I'm sorry this upset you so. I didn't dream it would upset you—talking about your father."

Marie tried to deny it, but her looks could deny nothing. She had sunk to a chair, beaten down. She breathed heavily as if she'd been in a physical combat. But she kept her eyes on Mrs. Dickson's serene face. Because of the fixity of her gaze, the air turned darker, the face sharply lighted in the center of pulsating rings of shadow. It was almost like fainting, Marie thought frantically. . . .

That was how Kent found her when he came into the shop.

He looked at her, then at his mother. "What have you been saying to her, I'd like to know?"

"Why, I declare!" Mrs. Dickson gasped. "We've only been talking of your wedding plans!"

Marie wanted to call that a lie. "Your mother's been telling me to wake up. There's to be no wedding. It's all a dream. That's what she's telling me." But she said this only to herself.

Kent looked at them both again, incredulously. "You mean, Mother—everything's all right!"

"We didn't discuss the wedding entirely," Mrs. Dickson hedged. "We got off the subject somehow."

"I thought so!" Kent said hotly. "You had her on the mat about her father! And that's why I came here. I came to tell you, Mother, you needn't ask Marie any more questions. I've found somebody that can answer them all for her. A man who's been down there. Just got back from Paramaribo. A Marine."

Marie asked, trying to loosen her voice: "You talked to him?"

"No. That's just it. I've been hunting all over the Quarter for him. If I'd only recognized him when he came out of your shop this morning—remember?"

"Yes. Of course," Marie said, feeling dizzy. She did not know exactly what she was saying. "Yes, he was down there. He told me. A man gave him something—a gift for—" She clutched her wrist, covering the hammered bracelet, unable to go on. The ruse was too preposterous.

They both watched her, Mrs. Dickson like a cat. "Yes? You were saying—"

"He can tell you," Marie said, exhausted, "when you find him."

"I'll find him!" Kent said enthusiastically. "Paul Hardy—he'll solve everything!"

"Paul—who?" his mother asked.

"He's the Marine we're talking about. I know him. He went to Tulane a class or two before mine. The whole Quarter knew him before he enlisted. A swell fellow!"

But Mrs. Dickson said grimly: "I must meet him."

CHAPTER FOUR



HAT Marine was at Saint Jack's. He sat in the yard which might be called a patio although it was little more than a light-well.

Sergeant Hardy had been on the point of leaving several times but Saint Jack kept reminding him, "You don't want to go see Marie when the old lady's still there. Her carriage is out in front of the shop."

Paul got up. I'll take a walk up Canal. This place gets me. I feel cooped up. Gets my nerves."

"You hurt my feelings. What's wrong with this place? All you armed forces want is to walk up Canal and grin at the pretty girls."

"It's what I wanted when I came to town. But not now. There's only one girl in the world."

"All right, wait. I was going to tell you some more about her father."

"You're telling me? I know it already. He was in the pen eight years, and it wasn't you that told me."

"Listen. Wait now, Paul, please. I'm really going to let you in on it. Knowing a little is a dangerous thing. Now look: He got into a little trouble down in Baratania Bay."

It was the first time, probably, that Saint Jack had said as much to a soul! And the reason he told it, Hardy guessed, was because of a crisis in Marie's affairs.

"He was just helping his friends, those Chinamen in the shrimp camps," Saint Jack explained truthfully. "You know those camps down yonder. They ship dried shrimps to the restaurants in New York."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, he got into just a little jam. I'm not saying he ever went to jail. But what if he did? I been in jail myself. He didn't do anything wrong. Just like you and me might buy liquor in the bootleg days. Those days changed our ideas about contraband."

"You mean he was a bootlegger?"

"Of course not! Who said that!"

"Then he was a smuggler."

"Well, technically maybe so. But not for money. He was just helping those Chinks, see? They were friends of his and they had cousins they wanted smuggled in. Lank said whenever he stopped at those drying-platforms in his dory, they'd give him dried shrimps and coffee. He'd give 'em flowers and talk philosophy. The depression was on and Lank couldn't get steady work. But he said if he'd had all the money in the world, he couldn't wish for more—living down in the marsh, food any time he wanted from the Chinks. 'I'm getting to be a regular tramp,' he says to

me. It was only his wife and daughter that kept him from loafing down there the rest of his life."

Paul Hardy was thinking. A man could lose himself for eight years right down in those marshes, if he wanted to stay out of the world. That might have been the answer! But it didn't fit with the South American yarn. That yarn meant that Marie was covering up something. She was covering eight years.

Saint Jack tried to explain. "One of the old Chinks who'd befriended him wanted his two sons brought in from a freighter out of the Gulf. The Chinks had dories too, but they couldn't go out account of the Coast Guard watching for aliens getting smuggled in. Lank helped the old Chink get his sons. What's wrong with that?"

"I'm not saying it's wrong," Hardy laughed. "I'd help a Chink any time. They're our allies, aren't they?"

"Yes, but this was eight years ago," Saint Jack pointed out. "But you got the right slant exactly. That's why I'm telling you, so you'll get the right slant on the whole set-up. And it's this: Marie, she's marrying into a Creole family and she doesn't want 'em to know about her dad's past. That's natural, aint it?"

"What do I care about her father's past? When I find a girl I've been looking for all my life, I don't care who her father is or what he's done. I've found the girl."

"But you aint thinking straight!" Saint Jack said in despair. "Maybe if I told you the whole truth about Lank Jeffries, you'd think straighter. Sit down and I'll fix you another julep. I'll be right back."

Saint Jack went into the lounge. He glanced across the potted palms down the street and noticed that Mrs. Dickson's carriage was not there. The point was of imminent importance. For that old phaeton and the magnificent Mrs. Dickson stopping at Marie's shop had changed the course of events. Saint Jack had seen the events changing before his very eyes.

He had seen Lank Jeffries trudging slowly toward the shop, standing there a moment, looking up at the coachman, then at the window. He had seen the policeman motioning the vagrant on his way.

"Just killing time, waiting for the old lady to leave before going in to see his daughter." That was Saint Jack's natural assumption.

He served a customer or two, trying to keep his eye on the street, watching for Lank Jeffries' return. But Lank did not return. Instead, Saint Jack saw Marie coming through the bright mist, half running.

She came in and stood, wilted, clutching the edge of the bar the way Lank Jeffries himself had gripped it.

"Looking for your dad?" Saint Jack said, worried at her drawn face. When she gave a tired helpless shake of her head, he said, "He'll be there any time now. Take it from me."

But she said, "Kent's hunting for somebody, and so is his mother—somebody who can tell them about Dad!"

"I know who they're hunting for—a Marine sergeant. Right?"

"Then he's been in here!" she said frightened.

"Listen, sister! I keep a cocktail lounge. And I know my business, I hope. If I go telling folks who's been here, first thing I know some lady hears her husband's been here when he shouldn't ought to."

"Please, Saint Jack. I've got to find that Marine!"

Saint Jack, needing time to think, hung his frayed bar towel near one of the cages so the canary could pick threads for its nest.

"But what'll I do, Saint Jack?"

He had a perfect answer for that one. "Just take this bracer and keep calm. That's all you got to do."

"I haven't time."

But he poured her an *apéritif*. "Bring all your worries to me. You came to the right place! That Marine aint going to tell a soul in the world!"

"But he came into my shop. He tried to make love—"

"He'd be a nut if he didn't. A soldier on leave! What's the matter with you?"

"But he meant it."

"We all mean it. And we're all going to help you out."

"If he's in love with me, why will he help me marry Kent?"

The girl was too smart, asking questions like that—too smart for Saint Jack to answer. "You didn't drink what I gave you. You hurt my feelings."

When she took a gulp, he said out of the side of his mouth, "I told you not to worry about that Marine. Have I ever told you anything without I got ways to back it up?"

"No." But she still clung there, looking very small behind his bar, like a minor he should have chased out.

"Then give that little smile." He saw her wrist as she lifted the glass. "Suits your skin just right—that bracelet."

She coughed on her drink. "The Marine gave it to me, He got it in Paramaribo."

Saint Jack coughed tobacco-smoke. "No wonder you can't forget him!" He added, half to himself: "He may tell Kent, at that! I would myself, when I was his age. Everything's fair—" He raised his voice. "Listen, sister: Let Mrs. Dickson hunt till she's blue in the face, and let Kent hunt. *They aint going to find that Marine!* Now, this hen canary, she's pretty good. Knows which eggs aint fertile, and shoves 'em right out the nest."

"Thanks, Saint Jack." Marie said, completely satisfied. She turned, suddenly gay. "I've got to get back to my shop. Got to be there when my father comes."

Saint Jack went to the phone. He called up his best friend, Bob Wattles, who kept the oyster-bar a square down the street.

"Say, Bob. Marie's in a little trouble, and I was wondering if you could come over here with three-four of the boys. Tell 'em it's open house this morning."

CHAPTER FIVE



PASSING from the coolness of Jackson Square into the spicy warmth of Decatur, Lank Jeffries walked as if pulling against a weight.

"I could even go in and talk to her—just a little while. I could say hello to her, at least. I could see what she looks like, instead of wondering and trying to see her in my mind. She's a very pretty little thing, they tell me. A beauty, they say. We would talk about one thing or another for maybe an hour. Not about the past. No use just for an hour making ourselves miserable. We would talk about how glad we were after so long, that's all. But she wouldn't want me to stay even an hour. Perhaps just half an hour. But some one would see me. They'd know who I was. She wrote me she was telling everybody I came from Paramaribo. Anybody on that street would know I'm the man from the jungles! There'd be lots more guessing and gossip and lies."

His lip curled a little. "The hobo jungle at Baton Rouge—the Willows—that's the jungle I came from!"

Downriver from the French Market, he sat on a cotton-bale and took off his shoes. Lord, that felt good! It put the pain into the definite past, like his crime. The luke-warm wind blowing on wet socks turned them cold by evaporation, washing his feet with ice. Pain and his past forsook him, leaving him like a sprawled scarecrow on the cotton-bale.

"Everything would be all right if I just figure it like this: I have no daughter at all."

But his hands clutching together brought the memory. He looked at them. Her face when she was only three bobbed up this time, and he heard her squeals of laughter as she pointed at his thick thumb-nail. That was the "turtle," because he had broken it once and it had the

thickness and color of a turtle-shell. His fingers had been little people or pets to her, and now they talked to him of his three-year-old Marie. "It would be easier for us, if I didn't go back even for half an hour."

A Negro dockerman turned to look at him. "How 'bout it, Cap'n? Feelin' good?" The dockerman sat on a near bale, groaning—a regular melody of fatigue.

Lank Jeffries realized without particular embarrassment that he had been thinking aloud. He saw the dockerman's sympathetic grin.

"Have you got a little kid?" he asked.

"I got a kid, suh. A whole lot."

"What would they do if you'd been in jail, and you got back? Suppose you went to see 'em when they were all dressed up, maybe to go to Sunday meeting? And you're shabby and just out of jail, and the little kids all dressed up fine? What would they say to you?"

"I don't know what you mean, Cap'n." The dockerman took out some dice, which he clacked in his hands in the perfect rhythm of a boula drum.

"I mean, wouldn't it be better not to go back to your kids at all?"

"Well suh, Cap'n, I got kids. I been in jail, too. But I don't know how you figure I don't go back to 'em." He consulted a roll of his dice. "And I got an ol' woman, which I don't go back to her too."

"You'd be all alone in the world, from then on. You wouldn't have any kids. They wouldn't have a father."

"Dass right, Cap'n. Dass a point."

"You wouldn't give up your kids—you can't figure that?"

The dockerman shook his head. "Dass queer figurin'. Oh, no suh, Cap'n! But," he added, somewhat intrigued with the idea, "but my ol' woman—if I jess kind of wash myself away. . . . Oh, now I know what you mean!" He crooned: "Wash me in de blood of de Lamb!"

"Let me have those dice a minute."

"Want to shoot with me, Cap'n suh?"

"I just want to decide something."

Lank Jeffries cast the dice on the top of the cotton-bale, read them, handed them back. The dockerman waited for him to carry on the amiable chatter, but he sat silent.

"The dice say not to give her up. The Negro said it. My own hands say it, the fingers telling me of the three-year-old squealing and laughing at me!" he thought.

He rubbed his forehead with a clenched fist. "I'll be hunting all my life for foolish tiny reasons for going back. I mustn't listen to them, or to anybody. I was lost in South America. Never came back."

He looked across the river which he was going to cross.

But before crossing over, he must go back and tell Saint Jack, so that all traces of this return to New Orleans could be covered.

SAINTE JACK went out to his patio just in time. The Marine out there was up and looking at his watch. "You thought you were keeping me here, didn't you, Saint Jack?" He grinned. "Well, you weren't doing any such thing. I wanted to stay away from Marie just a little while longer before going back to buy another bottle of cologne. This time I'll say it's for my sister."

"She says you Marines always come back for another bottle. Generally for a sister." Before Saint Jack closed the door between patio and lounge, the Sergeant saw several men at the bar, which a short while ago had been empty. That was the way with bars, of course; but these men were all looking at him, over Saint Jack's fat shoulder.

"Sit down, Paul. I got something to tell you."

But the Sergeant started for the door.

Saint Jack stopped him with the casual remark: "The gang out there is going to beat you up."

"That sounds all right. Sounds swell. But what for?"

"You know too much." Saint Jack put his arm around Paul's shoulder. "Listen now, Paul: Have you taken my advice before, many times? Now sit here just five min-

utes. I want to talk to that bunch. They're friends of Marie's. A river captain and a stevedore and Bob Wattles. You know Bob?"

Yes, Paul Hardy knew him—a Cajun with monstrous hands that were raw from shrimp-juice. Bob Wattles' skull would have interested the anthropology department at Tulane.

"They'll do anything for Marie. Die for her, like you say in books. Only this aint in a book."

IT occurred to Paul that Saint Jack's advice, as usual, might be worth considering. This little patio or light-well, with windowless walls three stories high, was a good place for skulduggery. And that reminded Paul of something rather sinister. Marie's father had spent eight years in the pen. Hence, his crime must have been more serious than smuggling Chinamen into Baratania Bay, which carried a penalty of only one year and a thousand dollars fine. Eight years sounded suspiciously like a murder rap. And this little gang here, willing "to die" for the murderer's daughter.

"I'll give you five minutes to talk to 'em," Paul conceded, but he could not help qualifying. "Tell 'em if they want a fight, I can't wait all day for 'em to start."

"If you'll just set here till I get back," Saint Jack said, "I'll warn 'em you're a Marine with a day off. What's a day off without a fight and a drink and a yarn or two—"

"And a girl."

Saint Jack went back to his birds and his cronies. But the manner of his persuading the latter to observe the peace was peculiar.

The river captain and stevedore and Bob Wattles moved closer, huddled, listening to him. "All I want is, you got to keep him here. He learned something when he was down in Pamaribo about Marie's dad, see?"

"Was her dad really down there?" Bob Wattles asked blandly.

"Listen, if I knew, I wouldn't tell you, would I?" Saint Jack cracked his towel like a whip. "Anyway, this Marine comes back, and Marie's boy friend hears this rumor about her dad covering up something in his past. The Marine can prove it, I don't know how. Just don't ask me questions. But he can break it up between Marie and her husband-to-be. No wedding bells, get it? And the Marine gets the girl himself."

"Oh, no!"

"That's all I wanted to hear you gents say."

They sipped and argued. They argued very logically, except for the stevedore, a young Irishman who was given more to flights of fancy than logic. Coloring the desire to help Marie out of a jam, was the fun of a carousal. He snapped his fingers, tapped a boot. "If there was only some way of getting him onto Cap Hubbard's tug."

"My tug! What you talking about?"

"Then when you shove your next string of barges up the river, you can put him ashore at Baton Rouge. Maybe he won't wake up till Vicksburg."

"None of that stuff. This aint Gallatin Street," Saint Jack said. "And it aint fifty years ago, either." Gallatin Street, he was on the point of explaining, was where they shanghaied sailors from New Orleans when his grandfather was a boy.

"Anyway, if you took him to Baton Rouge, what'd keep him from coming back?" said the oysterman. And that brought up a serious point: "Just how long you want to keep him here, Saint Jack?"

"He's got four days' leave."

"Wow!" the stevedore said exuberantly. "The party's lasting four days!"

The river captain was a realist. "Since we can't keep him prisoner for four days," he said, "what's your next play?"

Saint Jack fixed an old cocktail-strainer in which a canary had built its nest. "Course I don't mean we can keep

him prisoner at all, worse luck." He tied the strainer where it had tipped too much inside the cage. "What's your idea, Bob?"

Bob, the Cro-Magnon oysterman, did not look as if he had any idea. "Only thing I can think of is, tell him we'll beat him up if he don't get out of the Quarter."

"I already told him that," Saint Jack said simply. "He's a Marine." And this canceled Bob's suggestion completely.

"We'll get a lot of other characters, and tar and feather him," the imaginative Irishman said.

"He's in the Service," the captain objected. "You'd get tarred yourself!"

Saint Jack glanced at the back door, hearing the scrape of a chair on the flagstone. The five minutes were up!

"Let Dan, here, pick a fight with him," the riverman said, nodding to the stevedore. "We call Officer Cordoba. He'll take him to the precinct station, and he gets locked up four days."

"Maybe Dan gets locked up too," the oysterman said enthusiastically. "But you don't mind, do you, Dan? We'll get you right out, and then we celebrate."

The Irishman seemed happy. "Picking a fight—I've heard of that."

"Wait a minute," Saint Jack said. "Everybody would be on the Marine's side. Tim Cordoba wouldn't touch him."

"We're all witnesses," the river captain said. "But maybe we better get an M.P. over on Canal to do the arresting. I seen a lot of M.P.'s there, and on Front Street."

That would have been a good solution except for the element of time. This Marine chose the time to come out himself. The four men separated instinctively, standing at the entrance between potted plants, or at the juke-box or behind a table.

The oysterman sidled to the patio door, hoping to get behind him. The thirsty stevedore took a position at the bar. "Hi, soldier," he said, glaring at him. "I'm buying you a drink."

"I've had too many. Feel groggy, account of the hot climate," the Marine said.

"You call this hot, and you been to Paramaribo? This weather's perfect!"

"Go ahead, have a drink with him," Saint Jack said. "You hurt his feelings."

"Sure, I feel hurt," said the stevedore.

Paul Hardy whirled on the man nearest to him, the river captain. "Did I hear somebody say you can't touch me because I'm in the Service?" He took off his blouse. "There! I'm not in the Marines. I'm on leave."

One man in the room was suddenly frightened. And that was Saint Jack. They might begin throwing bottles. He snatched at two canary-eggs like a panic-stricken man saving something from a fire. Now that it was going to happen, Saint Jack began to pray.

AND his prayer was answered. It was certainly an answer that came smack down out of heaven, blessing his cool green house. It solved everything. It postponed the ruckus indefinitely. And it kept Paul Hardy prisoner indefinitely too.

A long-limbed, limping man came in through the palmettoes. Even Bob Wattles, the river captain and the stevedore, who did not know him, knew that he was somebody important by the look on Saint Jack's face.

For Saint Jack had guessed the truth. It was in the man's eyes. Pain was there, the tragedy which Saint Jack knew.

But his birds, sensing the break of tension, began to sing. "I want to talk to you, Saint Jack. Alone—in back yonder."

Eyes stared from the palmettoes, from next to the juke-box, from behind the bar. And the Marine who was in the center of the room stared as the vagrant trudged back toward the patio where Saint Jack sent him.



On the sidewalk, Marie said: "Tell it to me again!"

The stevedore, who was thinking in a groove, did not realize that the fight was sidetracked, until Saint Jack threw his towel at him. It had the effect of a second who thus signalizes the end of the bout.

Coming from behind the bar, Saint Jack took the Marine's arm. "You aint leaving, Paul?"

"I thought someone was stopping me," Paul Hardy said, which meant: "If no one's stopping me, what's the fun in trying to leave?"

"Someone is stopping you," Saint Jack said. "That gent in there—he's a friend of Marie's dad. Maybe her dad aint coming back, after all." He saw that they were all listening. "Bob, you fill them glasses, and everyone smile till I get back." He hurried out.

Lank Jeffries had slumped to a chair out in the patio. He looked up, smiled a little. "Everything's all right now, Saint Jack. Marie can tell everybody what she always told 'em. I was lost—down yonder."

Voices in the bar growled, then lifted as the stevedore and Marine began to shout at each other. A dull thump shook the place, so that the two men in the patio could feel its jar in the mossy flagstones.

Saint Jack winced. "Wait'll I stop that argument in there, Lank." He ran back to his bar.

Lank Jeffries heard some more of the "argument," although it did not interest him in the slightest. He had seen enough brawls in the last eight years, vicious ones, and a little ruckus like this was not worth turning in his chair to see. On the contrary, he was absorbed in something at the opposite pole of human emotions. He took out an old tobacco-bag stuffed with seeds and dried flowers. The lavender stuff was chinaberry, blooming this month. The white blossom was from a May-haw tree, although the blooms should have been gone when Lank Jeffries walked out into the free world. He had found a tree abloom for some reason, a month late. These shreds of luck he had brought for Marie in remembrance of old days; but he could not give them to her after all!

Perhaps Saint Jack could give the bag to her. "No, it would hurt her if she knew I came to New Orleans."

That was what he was thinking during that short minute or two of brawling on the other side of the patio door.

Saint Jack came out puffing, his neck swollen with fury. He had a cage in one hand and two eggs in the other, one of which was broken. He set these on the table and ran back fuming: "Bustin' my eggs! I'll bust their chins open—the whole gang!"

He started back. But the fight seemed to be over, for there was a sudden silence except for men running. A crowd, doubtless, had gathered beyond the potted palms on the sidewalk.

Saint Jack said, a little puzzled: "I'll be right back, Lank. I want to see what they did to that Marine." He said to himself: "Guess it wasn't fair me sicking three men on him like that. Three heavyweights. Should've given him a chance. He's only a kid, after all."

He turned for the door of his bar and saw the Marine standing there, rubbing his knuckles. "You get back there and sit down, Saint Jack."

Beyond the Marine, Saint Jack had caught a glimpse of the riverman getting crushed ice for his eyes, of Bob Wattles picking the stevedore up from the sawdust. Saint Jack was not so interested in that background as he was in the Marine's face, which was skinned at the cheekbone, bleeding slightly at the lip. This Paul Hardy, it occurred to old Saint Jack, was no longer the long-haired bespectacled kid they used to call "the Professor" in his Tulane days. "He said he could've made quarterback except for his eyes, and we thought it was an alibi!" Saint Jack remembered. "We make mistakes sometimes."

"Why don't you sit down, you old porpoise?" Paul Hardy shut the door to the bar, and came out and shoved Saint Jack backward so that he flopped to a chair. "You got a gang in your joint to threaten me, and then beat me up—and what for? Because I happen to know something. And because I'm going to tell something. *Didn't you?*"

Saint Jack nodded, his mouth wide open. But then he shook his head, not knowing which answer the Marine wanted. In the other chair, Lank Jeffries sat, turning casually to look up in mild admiration.

"I know something because I was in Paramaribo. Is that my fault?"

"No, of course not, Paul. No hard feelings."

"Then get this: Kent Dickson wants to find out from me—" He checked himself. "Who's this bird?"

"Friend of Marie's dad, like I was trying to tell you—"

Paul looked at the vagrant a moment, his anger mollified by the gentle eyes. "All right, he can hear it too, if he's a friend. Kent wants me to tell him what I know about her dad. And I'm sure going to do it now! And I'm going to tell Marie, if she was my girl, I wouldn't care who her dad is. I'd say, if Kent is so particular about her kinfolk, what she ought to do is to tell him to go plumb to hell."

Saint Jack said faintly: "You really going to tell that, Paul?"

"And why not? You think I'm a rat, don't you, just because I want to cut Kent Dickson out? Maybe I ought to be a sport and give them time to have their own falling-out. But I haven't time. I haven't got even four full days left! I'm going to tell everything I know, and then let her figure out which one's the rat—me or Kent."

He turned for the bar; but the soft, burning, sunken eyes of that other man held him. And those bony hands seemed to hold him too, although they were merely tearing petals of dried flowers to pieces.

The man said: "Can I talk to you, friend?"

"No. I'm through talking to everybody. . . . What—what do you want to talk to me for?"

The vagrant motioned Saint Jack to go back to his bar. They were calling for him in there anyway, which gave the old duffer excuse enough to get out.

Standing, Paul Hardy watched the man's face turned up to him.

"This yarn about Marie's dad being held captive by Indians," the man said, "it's only a yarn."

"As I've figured out."

"Saint Jack will admit it. He'll announce it to the whole Quarter. He'll say somebody sent a cablegram to Marie, care of Saint Jack. Somebody made a mistake—a missionary down there thought he'd found Lank Jeffries. But it wasn't Marie's dad. I happen to know, because I'm her dad's friend, and I investigated. Her dad doesn't even exist."

The man stopped as if he were out of breath. Paul saw him tear the last petal and squeeze it, and hold it to the bars of that cage Saint Jack had rescued. Apparently he had finished his message, for his eyes did not attempt to hold his listener any longer.

But he added one more statement: "So you can tell all that to Marie or to Kent Dickson or anybody. You can tell them you never heard of a captive coming out of the jungle to Paramaribo while you were down there. Naturally, you didn't hear it, because it was only a false rumor. You can tell it everywhere; it'll do no harm. You can do Marie no harm!"

His eyes turned up again, and there was a shine of triumph in the sockets. "You see? You can't win her from Kent Dickson at all. No matter what you tell her now!"

He pried into the tobacco-pouch for some more seeds or petals, but finding it empty, reached into his coat pocket for more. He brought out a bulb and a shred of dried weeds. . . . That was how Paul Hardy knew, of a sudden, who this man was.

CHAPTER SIX



SERGEANT HARDY went into the cocktail lounge where Saint Jack was explaining to the laughing crowd. "No, it wasn't a fight. It wasn't anything. Less said about it the better. Happens in the best of families."

Luckily, the Sergeant did not see Bob Wattles or the river captain anywhere; for the crowd, hooting at them for trying to fight a boy in the Service, had persuaded them to slink off home. As for the stevedore, whose Irish blue eyes were now like glass marbles, there was no use persuading him one way or the other. Let him just sit there under a bird-cage, mumbling to himself.

The Marine laughed back at the crowd, accepted the back-slapping, refused their drinks, shouldered his way to the sidewalk.

For out there on the sidewalk he saw—among others who had been attracted by the noise—someone he was very anxious to meet.

Kent Dickson called to him: "Hi there, Paul! I heard a Marine had cleaned up Saint Jack's place, and I thought it might be you. Remember me, Paul?"

Saint Jack saw this, and threw up his hands in utter defeat. He had just served a lot of customers, and he had to rest. He flopped to his high stool, mopped his brow and felt his sixty years. "Did my best," he moaned aloud. "and it wasn't too good."

Paul went out and shook Kent's hand. "Sure I remember you, Kent. This is swell. Heard you been looking for me."

"Right. There's something I wanted to ask you: Paul, when you were down in Paramaribo, did you happen to hear of a man who'd just escaped from the jungles? Must've been when you were there."

"That reminds me," Sergeant Hardy said. "Remember old Prof. Quentin out at Tulane?"

"What's he got to do with it?"

"Let's walk on down the street away from this crowd," the Sergeant said, heading for Marie's shop. "Good old Prof. Quentin! Remember he was always getting us to read Boccaccio when we were fed up on the heavy stuff? Boccaccio's Tales—his idea of light reading! Remember that tale about the husband who had a perfect wife, but he wanted to find out something about her anyway? Thought maybe he could find one weak spot."

"No, I don't remember. What are you driving at, anyway! I was asking you about—"

"This husband in the Boccaccio tale—well, he figured maybe his wife wouldn't be so perfect if he could put her to the right test under just the right conditions. So he asked his friend to test her out while he went off to the country for a while. Well, his friend tested her just right! And the husband found out something he shouldn't have been looking for."

"Yes; and so—you mean, what?"

"Well, the friend won out. And none of us fellows at Tulane ever blamed him for winning, either!" They walked on. "What did you want to ask me about Paramaribo?"

Kent Dickson flushed. "So that's what you're driving at!" He was pretty handsome, blushing, with the sun kindling copper lights in his black curls. "Well, I—to tell the truth, I'm not the one who wants to know. It's my mother. The only reason I'm trying to find out anything at all, is so I can spike a damned rumor that's got around. Don't you see? I want to prove something to Mother."

"Where is your mother?"

"She was going to meet me at Marie's. She's riding around—"

"Good. I'll tell her everything. I'll tell you both. Why," he exclaimed in surprise, "here's Marie's shop right now! We were both walking straight to it without knowing it!"

In Saint Jack's patio a man arranged dried petals in a Victory "V." When things quieted down, Saint Jack came out and saw the sign on the slate-topped table. And he saw the same sign in the man's eyes.

"I was just thinking, Saint Jack," the man said. "I heard of a florist shop over on Congo Square. The owner had to leave, being an alien—"

"Lank, I thought you were going out West."

The man gave a start. "I keep forgetting. It's hard to shake it off—all the plans I had, getting back to Marie, opening a little florist shop and all."

"If you need any help, Lank—a loan, maybe, to start a business out West somewheres—"

"But I want to tell you something first—something we both forgot. I didn't think of it; neither did you. The only one who thought of it was that tough boy who just went out, that leatherneck."

Saint Jack groaned. "Don't bring him up."

"He's got a slant on this we've forgotten. If Marie gets the man she wants, what kind of a marriage would it be? She'll be telling a lie the rest of her life, telling it to her little kids, telling it from the wedding-day on to the end!"

"I never heard the Marine say that!"

"No, but from what he did say, I figured he was thinking it. He doesn't want Kent and Marie to get married, and he knows he's got the right on his side. He said it wouldn't make any difference to him who Marie's dad is; but it does make a difference to Kent Dickson. And if Kent never finds it out, it means he's been cheated."

"What's wrong with that?" Saint Jack asked. "Marriage is a bargain. Two parties size each other up, both of 'em pulling the wool over the other's eyes. 'Taint cheating at all. It's horse-trading. That's how I was married."

"I want to ask you something, Saint Jack. If Marie should tell Kent the truth—"

"What! Why, she'd cut her tongue out first! Not because of what she might lose, but because of you. Her pride in you—see what I mean? If anybody said a word

against you, she'll tear their eyes out. Let alone saying it herself!"

"If I told him, I wouldn't give any alibis, no. I got caught smuggling Chinamen into the shrimp-camps down yonder. It was a crime; I was guilty. And worse than that, I fought the Coast Guard because I knew it would mean a year in jail, when I had a little daughter and her mother to think of. What if I told Kent Dickson that?"

Saint Jack sat in stony silence.

"Wouldn't Kent understand that I got the eight years because those Chinks killed one of the Coast Guardsmen?"

Saint Jack sidestepped the answer by saying: "Lucky for you that fight was way out west of the Sabine, Lank. Otherwise you'd been brought back right here in the Federal jail in the old Mint. No one knows about it, Lank. No one will ever know. I mean, if you stick to it—that you were lost in South America and never came back. Let it go at that."

"But you haven't answered me straight: What would Kent Dickson do? Or don't you know?"

"I happen to know," Saint Jack said. "Kent was in here getting confidential the other night. It'd kill his mother, he says. He'd have to break with Marie. I got that straight from Kent. There won't be any marriage—if they find out!"

Lank Jeffries straightened his shoulders as if throwing off a burden. It seemed almost as if he were relieved to get this question answered so definitely.

He swept away the petals. "Tell Marie I'll write her from out West. It'll be the same as the last eight years, I'll keep on writing her, care of you."

THE warm wind breathing of oleanders and pomegranates in the patios, breathed also of excitement. The French Quarter knew something was going on when they saw Saint Jack with his barkeep's apron and straw hat hurrying to Marie's. There had been a ruckus, some knew, in his ordinarily quiet lounge. They had seen, a few moments ago, two men coming from there—Kent Dickson and a Marine.

Kent, instead of going into Marie's shop, kept on, hurrying down the street for about a square, where a phaeton and a Negro coachman waited outside a bookstore. Kent came out of the store a moment later with a handsome gray-haired lady and both of them walked to the perfume shop.

A patrolman, sauntering from the precinct station on Chartres, saw all this and it occurred to him that previously this morning he had seen a vagrant in front of Marie's shop. The patrolman, Tim Cordoba, had been unable to forget the look in the vagrant's eyes and the queer voiceless exclamation, the shake of the lips. Officer Cordoba had heard that Marie's father was coming home from somewhere. He had heard it from Marie herself early that morning when she called to him cheerily. Precisely in the manner of Saint Jack treating a policeman at his bar, she had presented him with a marble-sized vial of perfume. "I'm celebrating," she said. "You see, my father's coming home today!"

Later, Officer Cordoba was troubled with the inkling that her father and that vagrant might be one! But he dismissed the notion, remembering that the vagrant had walked away submissively toward the river.

And there were others who caught that queer tenseness in the warm air—a hurricane tenseness. The tobacconist next door to Saint Jack's remembered how he had told the Marine that Marie had grown up and was something to see! The tobacconist had witnessed the altercation at Saint Jack's which was nothing to get excited about, he thought, until he realized that Saint Jack was a sort of godfather to Marie. And Bob Wattles, the oysterman, was another guardian if not a godfather.

Bob Wattles, as a matter of fact, although he had a cracked front tooth, had stopped opening shells at his

oyster bar and was looking down the street to Marie's shop. The tobacconist and oysterman left their stands simultaneously and went down the *banquette* to see what was happening. The whole Quarter was of a like mind, wanting to see and hear.

Saint Jack reached the perfume shop but paused just a moment at the window. He looked very unhappy. His ruddy face was grim, his eyes blinking off and on like lights imperfectly wired. This was a terrible message he had to take to Marie! He must tell her that although her father had served his long sentence, and was free to come and see her and live with her, he was not coming. She must get that straight before Saint Jack could announce to the Quarter that this rumor about the "captive and the tribe of Indians" was false. She must understand what he meant when he told everybody that her father was still lost, unheard of for many years, dead without any doubt. Saint Jack blinked hard.

But a few moments before he reached Marie's, he saw Paul Hardy entering ahead of him. He must wait. . . .

Sergeant Hardy found Marie preening herself, getting ready for another encounter. She shaded her lids where the blue had been smirched—from crying, the Sergeant guessed easily enough. "So, Kent found you," she said in a low voice.

"He went to get his mother, down the street a ways. She was hunting for me too."

Her eyes darted from her hand-mirror up to him, noticing his bruised face. "You look as if you've been in a fight."

"So do you."

The heat had made little curls which stuck in a row above her tired forehead. "Yes, I've been in a fight," she said. "I'm going on fighting."

As if freshening up between rounds, she smoothed her white lace collar over the black bodice, touched the base of her throat with a wet stopper from a perfume bottle, touched the under side of her wrist, then the crook inside her elbows where her skin was almost snow white. "Did you tell Kent about what you heard down in Paramaribo?"

"I'm waiting for his mother. I'm going to tell them both."

"Tell them what?"

"For one thing—" he began. (But he said the rest to himself: "I could tell her that her father is at Saint Jack's. He's made up his mind to drop out of her life so she can marry Kent. He's going to give up the one thing he's got in the wide world—his daughter. She's going to lose him. Except that I'm going to have my say. I'm going to ball that plan up just right!")

"What are you saying?"

The Sergeant shook his head, waking up. "Nothing."

"Your lips were moving. They hurt, I suppose. They're cut. You got hit pretty hard, didn't you?"

"Saint Jack got his gang to beat me up."

"Yes? I don't believe it. What for?"

"Because of you."

She smiled, her tongue in her cheek, as she used her lipstick.

"It was worth it," he added.

"Was it? But I heard it was you that beat them up."

Sheepishly he said: "They tried to keep me in his bar so Kent wouldn't find me."

MARIE got a little *flacon* of ointment, and came from behind her showcase. She dabbed his lip with some of that balm called in Creole *boie soie*. She put some of it on his bare cheek.

He listened to her voice, wishing he could hear it for four days. If he could just sit out there in her patio listening while she talked to her customers! It was like the singing of birds in that magnolia out there—thus his fancy roamed while she doctored him.

"You always get into fights, don't you, you Marines? Then you make love and tell your yarns. You can tell any yarn you want to Mrs. Dickson, and I'll tell her it isn't true. I'll tell everybody. I'll keep on telling them the rest of my life."

While she nursed him, he wanted to lift her up from her feet and smother her.

But Mrs. Dickson came in just then, with her son.

CHAPTER SEVEN



ERGEANT HARDY with his back to the shop door did not know anyone had come in until he saw Marie's face. Then he

reached out his arms to steady her.

Compared to Marie, who was gasping at the heat, Mrs. Dickson seemed delightfully cool. It was remarkable, the Sergeant thought, how these fine ladies could keep cool in such tight clothes. The richer they are, the cooler and smoother they look.

When Kent introduced Paul to his mother, she broke out in bubbling chatter about absolutely nothing. She kept it up, the Sergeant not listening, until they were all in the patio.

Mrs. Dickson sat, her parasol tapping a slipper of snake-skin and suede. Kent stood behind her, sucking fast at his cigarette. Marie sat under the magnolia, looking down confusedly at her lap, where her hands were clutched. She was on the mat again.

"Yes ma'am, I was in Paramaribo," Paul Hardy said in answer to Mrs. Dickson's question. As he spoke, he noticed that Saint Jack had come into Marie's shop and was standing there looking into the patio.

Marie saw him, and jumped to a conclusion that was at once intuitive and logical. "My father's come!"

"No, that's not it, Marie! He didn't come! He isn't coming. I just wanted to tell you before—"

"You let me tell it, Saint Jack!" The Sergeant raised his voice. "And you stay out of this. Is it to be another brawl, or what?"

The tobacconist, a policeman and Bob Wattles, came into Marie's shop and stood behind Saint Jack. People looked out of windows above the patio. Someone looked down from the wrought-iron gallery. From the sidewalk more spectators peered into Marie's shop.

Sergeant Hardy announced it to all of them: "Her father is coming. I saw him!"

Marie's tired eyes blossomed with light. Nothing for the moment mattered to her, except that her father was home! "This kid's going to have her father." That was the Sergeant's one decision. It was his one motive in telling the whole French Quarter what he told.

Saint Jack wrung his hands. "He *aint* coming! What do you know about it, anyway? You never even saw him!"

"You think I didn't? Maybe it was somebody else I saw—a lank fellow who looked like Andrew Jackson, with pockets stuffed with dried flowers. Is there anybody else that fits a description like that?"

Marie cried: "Where did you see him?"

"Down in Paramaribo!" Sergeant Hardy told the world. He spoke that line, ad libbing. It was an inspiration. Actually he had not intended to say it, until he realized to his consternation that he had forgotten something very important. Marie was to have her father back home again, yes; but she was going to be broken-hearted. That was what would happen when Kent threw her over!

But with this inspiration hitting from the blue, he found how Marie could have Kent and her father too!

Mrs. Dickson picked up a palm-leaf fan from the patio table. She was no longer cool. Even her eyes were hot, burning in frustration, puffy despite the nightly beauty-

mask that kept down the patches. She listened, staring, as the French Quarter listened and stared.

"Of course, nobody was sure who he was when I first heard of him," the Sergeant of Marines said. "That was when we were camped inland a ways. A missionary priest told us he'd heard of a white man who'd disappeared up in those mountains on the border of Brazil."

"What were you doing there?" Mrs. Dickson asked.

Everyone looked at her, surprised at this interruption. The Sergeant said, as surprised as anyone: "I was on a reconnaissance detail. Why?"

She fanned herself, not answering. Kent said breathlessly: "Go on, Paul!"

"Of course we weren't hunting any lost white man, if that's what you mean," the Sergeant said, facing Mrs. Dickson down. "That wasn't our job. But the priest got us interested. He said he knew lots of white men who traded with the Trio Tribe, and a few who traded with the tribe beyond which were the Diaus. But he'd only heard of one man going as far as the Salomas, which are still further in the jungle. That man might be the one who'd been lost many years ago."

"And it was!" Kent said enthusiastically.

"Wait and figure it out for yourself," the Sergeant went on. "We heard about him again from the Brazilian Boundary Commission. Their field force had just run into a man—that was on the Mapuera River. The Commission crowd figured he'd come over from French Guiana, maybe escaping from Cayenne. He looked like it, living on cassava roots, and that native rum they call *soppie*. And they suspected he was French: that's because he spoke a patois kind of French as well as English. You know what the patois was? The gumbo dialect of our Louisiana marshes!"

Saint Jack's face beamed with a heavenly light. He had got his cue! "That was Lank Jeffries, all right! He used to live in the marsh country! Didn't he, Marie?"

Nodding, Marie kept her eyes on the Sergeant, listening to the lie like a spellbound bird.

"Anyway, the man was a fugitive; they knew that," Paul went on. "And he really was a fugitive, not from Cayenne, but from that Indian tribe. He wouldn't bother with the Boundary Commission fellows. He gave them the slip and headed down for the coast. That would have brought him to Pointe Française, but he chose crossing the rain forests and hitting the coast in Dutch Guiana instead. I'm telling you just what I heard piecemeal from different people, you understand—the priest, the Boundary Commission force, some bush archaeologists, the *granman* of a friendly tribe up in the Tumac-Humac mountains."

"But you never saw him, did you say?" Mrs. Dickson asked faintly.

"Of course I saw him! Didn't I describe him to you? We saw him when he passed our camp heading downriver. He was in one of those cedar canoes they call a *corial* in that country. But it was when he stood on the beach, tall and rangy, I thought: 'There's an American! A backwoodsman. Andrew Jackson himself coming out of the woods to win at Chalmette!'"

"Sure it was Marie's father!" Saint Jack applauded.

"The captain in charge of our detail was busy with his road maps and survey, and so were our men. But I went over with our Trio guide, and we talked to this queer-looking man in the brush. He said he'd been in the rain forests eight years. He'd been treated swell, he said, but when he tried to get out he couldn't, because he was completely lost. The *granman* of the tribe wanted him to stick around, because he knew how to treat fevers and arrowwounds with boiled leaves. He wouldn't let the white man go.

"The captive tried every few months to escape, but the jungle would drive him back, sick and broken, and he'd have to get well again before he could make another break. If you knew that jungle the way we Marines got

to know it, you'd understand what I'm talking about. He'd get lost; he'd go crazy for a spell; he'd lie half dead from the leeches. So he was glad enough to get back his senses and find these tribesmen taking care of him!"

Sergeant Hardy waited a moment, not because he had run out of ideas, but because he saw Marie's face. It was glorious. It was as if she saw an ugly stump of a tree break out in a blossom before her eyes—that was how her father would have expressed it. The ugly stump was the prison sentence; the blossom was the Marine's story of the eight years!

Saint Jack prompted: "But Marie's dad, he got free at last! Didn't he, Paul?"

"I don't know how he did it," Paul said, "except that it was just plain luck, I guess, after trying ten, twenty, fifty times. When he got to the river and picked up that *corial*, he knew he was out. But he wasn't where he wanted to get. He asked us, there on the river-bank, how he could get a boat for the States. He wanted to get back to the States, bad!"

"But he'd have trouble getting there, we told him, because of the war. Shipping and the world had changed since he went into the jungles! He'd have to prove his identity. You see, the Boundary Commission had already sent out word to catch a man they thought was a Devil's Island fugitive. He didn't want any delays, he said. He wouldn't report to the authorities at Paramaribo. He would stow away on the first boat leaving for home. And that's why it didn't get out in the papers."

Sergeant Hardy waited for this covert but important remark to impress his listeners. Then: "Cap Benson, who was head of our detail, stuck to his map-making, and had no time to talk to this fellow, who seemed just the usual beachcomber. Cap didn't mention him in his report. And the Boundary Commission's report was only about a French fugitive without papers or a shred of identification. None of us ever saw him again, or heard of him. Not until Saint Jack got that cablegram."

Saint Jack looked as if he had swallowed one of his canaries. He realized that Paul Hardy had said in so many words: "Now you tell the rest!" But Saint Jack's training as a bartender was in keeping mum about the affairs of men, not elaborating on them! Hence he could only gulp and swallow.

Paul helped him out. "We never heard of the man again, I mean, except that we put two and two together. That priest I was telling you about—well, he'd been on the look-out for eight years. He knew the lost man had a wife and daughter in Louisiana. You see, the wife years ago had asked the authorities to search; but when she died, the search petered out. The good old priest was the only one who kept it in mind year after year. And he kept another thing in mind: If he ever found the man, he was to cable his daughter, care of a barkeep in New Orleans, named Saint Jack. A barkeep with that name is a combination a priest wouldn't be likely to forget!"

Saint Jack had had time enough to think, and now he put in a master-stroke. "He came as a stowaway on one of those freighters that bring bauxite from Paramaribo. They generally land here in town, so's they can transship the bauxite to East St. Louis for processing; but this ship changed her course account of the U-boats in the Gulf and landed at Houston instead! Lank Jeffries is coming from Houston, Texas!"

THEY were all inspired—those listeners in the patio, in the windows, on the gallery, in the shop. Even Mrs. Dickson was excited. She fanned herself furiously, which made her hotter and her powder streakier. This New Orleans weather after all was bad on tight clothes and good grooming. Mrs. Dickson looked a wreck.

Sergeant Hardy stared at her anxiously. She might choose to investigate, he had to admit; but if she did, she would find a lot of truth in the background of his fiction—

the Tumac-Humac mountains, the Diaus and the Salomas, and any number of Devil's Island fugitives that the Boundary Commission was always trying to hunt down! She might even check up on that reconnaissance party with Cap Benson, but she would have a hard time getting that out of the Marines, at least for the duration!

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Dickson had no reason to doubt. She was swept away by the collective enthusiasm of the whole French Quarter. They all believed. They all wanted to believe. Especially Kent Dickson!

Kent stepped to Marie to take her in his arms, but because of the crowd decided to wait. He had to wait, anyway, for she slipped from his reach when she saw the Marine shouldering his way through the shop, and the crowd that had burst out all talking at once.

Marie followed him to the street.

Out there on the sidewalk, the Sergeant felt her hand on his arm. He turned to look at her, waited, wondering what her method of thanking him would be. Very enthusiastic but polite, probably. He even got ready to laugh the whole thing off.

But she said: "Tell it to me again!"

He was astonished, because she really meant it! She was like a little girl who wants her favorite fairy-tale repeated many times. He almost believed that she would stand there on the sidewalk, oblivious of the chattering crowd in her patio and shop, drinking it all in once more, word for word!

But right then he saw Kent Dickson, beaming and excited, shoving his way through the shop. So Sergeant Hardy said: "I just have time to tell you what I left out in there. 'So you can live happily ever after!'"

THE Sergeant walked in the misty sunshine toward the Cathedral. He did not look at his watch any more, for he realized that he had time on his hands, and to spare. His first day was only half gone, so that he had three left, and a hot afternoon. Of course if he could forget Marie and hunt up another girl, time would race again.

But he could not forget her, because every white blossom of magnolia in the Cathedral garden took him back to her shop, which had the air of a garden itself.

He sat down on a bench where the air was not so thick with fragrance. But the statue of Andrew Jackson fairly shouted at him to remember Marie! He knew that wherever he went in the Quarter, they would ask him about her father, and the Mapuera River, the captive, the missionary priest. "You can't forget a girl in a set-up like that!"

All right, there were other places besides the Quarter, he reflected, where a Marine on leave could have some fun. Thus as he sat there, he was thinking exactly as Marie's father had thought! He would have to leave this town. That was the only way out!

He went back to the *pension* to get his suitcase.

His landlady said: "What! You aren't going to stay after all! You've found none of your friends? *Tsk, tsk!* By the way, have you heard? You know Marie, the pretty little Cajun who keeps the perfume shop? Well, her father came home—"

"So I hear."

"Her father is there now, I just heard from a *marchande* woman," the landlady gossiped on. "He really did come from South America after all!"

The Sergeant strapped his suitcase.

"It's quite romantic. You see, Marie's fiancé had some doubt. But they can get married now. Well, you must come again, M'sieur Paul. You can have your old room any time. You must write to me!"

He trudged along Toulouse, and the smell of the pecan rolls boiling in the candy shops brought her back again, almost in his arms, fixing his mouth with a sweet-smelling balm. He walked on, vaguely aware of carriage wheels

and the *clip-clop* of horses at a distance. When he caught a glimpse of the fine lady with a parasol crossing to the other side of Canal, he thought—as Lank Jeffries had thought—how Marie would be driving out on Saint Charles before many more days! His suitcase turned heavy.

He flopped to a stool at Bob Wattles' oyster bar. Before he left the Quarter, he must tell Bob Wattles there'd be no hard feelings.

Bob was shucking oysters with the complacency of a man opening his morning mail. "A dozen for you, Cap'n?" Bob looked across the bank of empty shells on his bar, and a grin stretched his mouth, smoke oozing from the corners as if it came out of his ears. Then he held out his enormous hand. "No hard feelings, kid."

Sergeant Hardy tried eating oysters while Bob gossiped on the inescapable theme. "Only think, Saint Jack gets us to beat you up so you wouldn't tell Kent Dickson something and bust up their wedding! Well, you sure told a mouthful! I heard it all. I been thinking. You know, if I was Marie, I'd tell Kent to go plumb to hell—his suspecting things thataway! And his mother snooping around. But she's got the laugh on 'em now. The laugh on everybody! Maybe that's why she was so sot on marrying Kent. I mean, so it'd stop this talk about her dad. But you put a stop to it yourself. Zowie, *did* you settle things!" Bob put his hand to his jaw, which was swollen and more like the Piltown skull than ever.

Paul Hardy could not eat any oysters until he got an appetizer. He lugged his suitcases to Saint Jack's.

Saint Jack crushed ice and mint, his face shining like the frost on the julep glass. "Her dad's gone over there," he said. "They're together at last. Thanks to you." Saint Jack put out his hand. "What are you leaving town for?"

"Crossing over. Going to Algiers."

"What's in Algiers? A lot of bagasse mills and sulphur docks. I thought you were in love with Marie?"

"That's why I'm leaving."

"But you aint thinking straight. Here you come into the Quarter, and fall in love with one of our girls, and bust up her engagement with a rich boy—"

"Who, me?"

"It was a swell yarn. It was a honey! And Kent believed it. But you should've stayed there after you finished talking to us all. You missed something—the blow-out." He chuckled a curious birdlike chuckle which got his pets harmonizing with him. The racket vibrated the hot air of spring. "I been expecting Marie to do it before this, and she did it at last. Told Kent, in so many words, I mean, to go plumb to hell."

The Sergeant pressed his mouth against crushed, fragrant ice and thought of Marie's palm.

"It aint a sudden change of mind like it looks, you understand," Saint Jack said in Marie's defense. "She's been brooding over it. I figure the reason she didn't do it before, was it would look too obvious, busting with Kent right when her dad got home. Folks would figure things out. They'd say it was account of her father. That's why she stuck it out, fighting for her dad all the time. But now that there's no more doubt about her dad's past, thanks to you, why, she can do as she pleases. I aint saying she wasn't in love with Kent. But he killed it. . . . Hey, wait a minute! Where you going? You forgot your suitcase—"

Sergeant Hardy passed Marie's window several times, looking into the rainbow of bottles, catching a glimpse of her through the back door of her shop, where she sat with her father under the hanging fern-baskets. Paul kept looking at his watch. Three days, and a warm afternoon left!

Finally a customer went in, and Marie had to come into her shop. Paul Hardy stood a moment on the sidewalk listening to her voice.

"Oh, yes, madame. The perfumes you use only at night in the North are proper all day down here, because this is, as we call it, the City of Joy."

THE END

Readers' Forum^{*}

(Continued from page 1)

A SMALLER CAPSULE?

The autobiographical sketches in the August issue are an interesting study. . . . Ray Nafziger with only one "I" where he chests himself because he has two daughters. . . .

"When Rivets Explode" was a swell piece of work. As you well know, the implements of war are manufactured in shops, and stories like that are very helpful to us shop guys.

"Science and the Cop," by Frederick Becholdt, a murder-mystery complete on the one page, is a honey. Let's have more of them. In these days, when most of us are working long hours, we get very tired, but we do need your stories more than ever to pep us up. To me, a story on the short side gives action and suspense in a smaller capsule, which is easier for a tired man to swallow. . . . Have you given any thought to what length our men in the service like best?

Daniel Berg,
Bridgeport, Conn.

HIS LAST STAND

For the years that I have been reading BLUE BOOK, today was the first time I have ever read the Forum. Strange, isn't it? But true.

I've always felt that BLUE BOOK was the one magazine of men by men, and for men until I noticed Myrtle Ann Walker's comments in the Forum.

Please, gentlemen, don't listen to the female howl for writers such as Beatrice Grimshaw and Agatha Christie. At home I subscribe to every magazine that you can name among the better weekly and monthly publications. And sad I am to think and relate that the old standby masculine publications have listened to the feminine saboteurs.

The best that I can get out of them now are the articles on current and interesting subjects, leaving the story department to my wife. My last stand for relaxation is BLUE BOOK, so don't let me down.

Ed. Sublett, Philadelphia, Pa.
(A traveling salesman)

P.S. The women must like it as it is, or they would be reading the others.

^{*}The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

NEXT MONTH

Thunder in the Fog

They were coming back from a bombing raid on Kiska when the Apparition loomed up out of the fog—an ancient tri-motored Ford plane, with the door gone from the fuselage, and a bearded fur-clad guy inside trying to take a sight with a sextant. . . . Malloy passed his hands over his eyes. "Next," he said, "a trained seal and a little girl with blonde curls come out, and they bounce a rubber ball back and forth across the leading edge." . . . But Teeters was serious. "It's unauthorized aircraft in a combat area," he growled, swinging his gun. "Do I shoot?" But, then a stick rose from the pit roof over the strange pilot's head, and from it flouted a bit of red, white and blue cloth. (Mr. Porter goes on from there.)

by William Earl Porter

Comanche Captive

Sully West was on a hide-hunting scout when he looked over the rim of the cañon and saw the big encampment of hostiles. He was about to belly-crawl away to his horse and ride for his life, when the young squaw in the gully just below glanced up and gave a startled cry before she ran. And in that instant Sully saw that the girl's eyes were blue. (One of Frederick Becholdt's best novels begins with this scene.)

by Frederick Becholdt

Three Monkey Pilot

The author of this fine novelette was born and brought up in India, and writes from first-hand knowledge of the strange ship's crew that set out from Bombay through the hazardous 1942 Indian Ocean to Madagascar.

by Kenneth Perkins

The Mystery of John Swift

Nineteen murders in various cities over a period of many years. But in each case the young woman victim had been shot—and a fellow calling himself "John Swift" wrote to the police afterward and confessed the murder!

by William Brandon

One's Got to Be Best

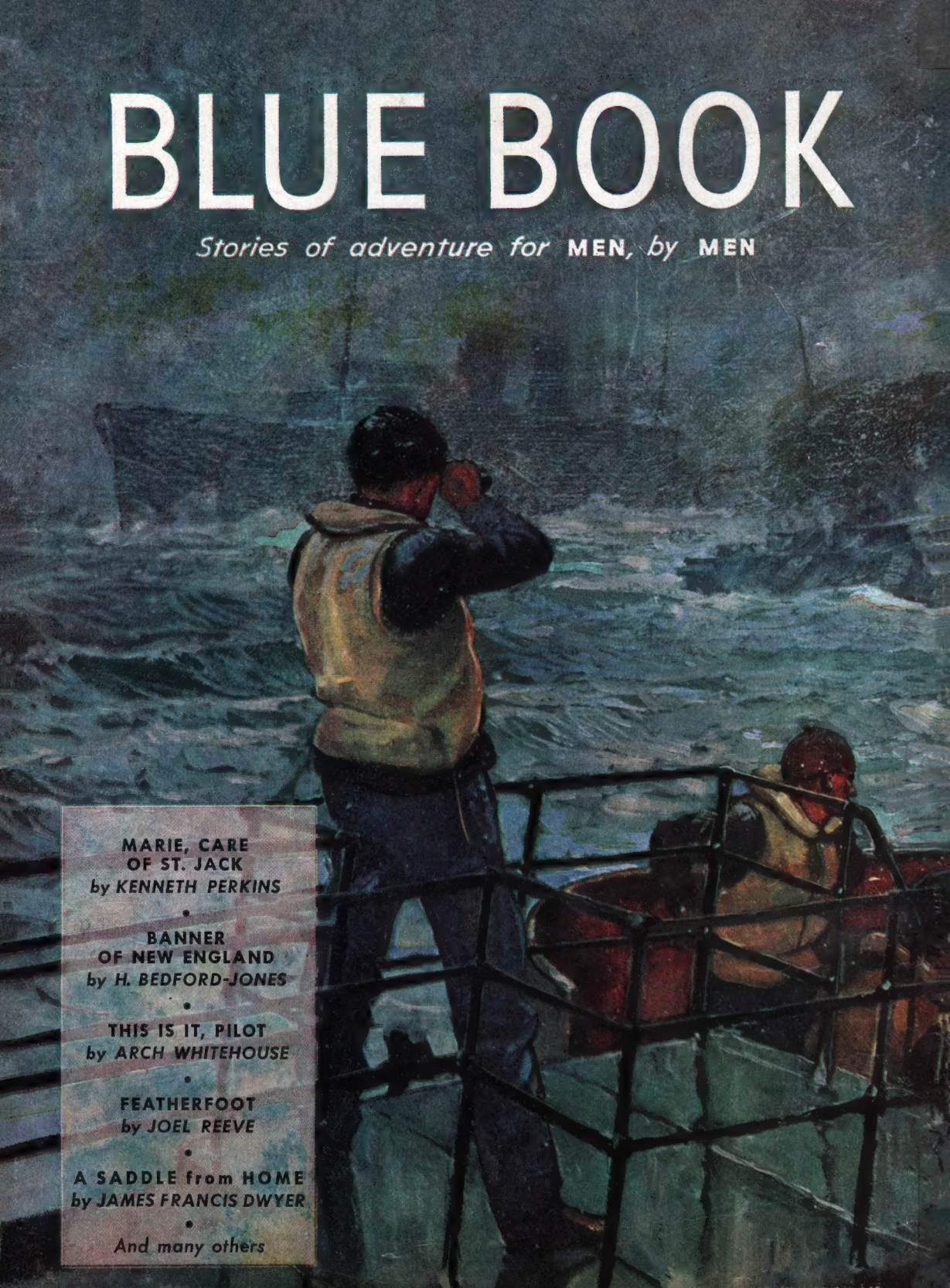
You might call it a prizefight story—but it's a fight story such as only a genius of whimsy could write.

by Nelson Bond

And many others, all in the forthcoming March issue of—

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

BLUE BOOK



Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN

MARIE, CARE
OF ST. JACK
by KENNETH PERKINS

BANNER
OF NEW ENGLAND
by H. BEDFORD-JONES

THIS IS IT, PILOT
by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

FEATHERFOOT
by JOEL REEVE

A SADDLE from HOME
by JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

And many others